



# Kemerton Clippings

Issue 27

Kemerton Conservation Trust Newsletter

January 2021

## Natural Networks Project Successfully Completed



Pyramidal Orchids in Limestone Grassland, KLNLR, 2019

Following completion of phase one of our Natural Networks project in March 2020 (see previous newsletter), phase two began at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNLR) in September 2020.

Phase two of the project included clearing vegetation from four of the islands on the lake to improve the habitat for nesting waders including Oystercatcher, creating an open corridor between the reedbeds and the woodland along the south bund of the lake by removing large numbers of self-seeded saplings, and continuing bramble and scrub clearance in the limestone grassland around the Settlement Ponds, to improve the habitat for butterflies, moths and other insects that rely on the wildflower rich grassland. In addition, the Trust held a project walk for members in August and carried out moth trapping onsite to record what species are on the site in June. Planned checks of the new bat boxes were not possible due to Covid-19 regulations last year, but we hope to carry them out this year.

After very wet conditions during phase one, weather conditions were much drier and phase two was completed without a hitch. The majority of the work was carried out by our contractors CRC Ecology, but their work was

supported by our volunteer warden and work party volunteers, who helped remove saplings from around the Settlement Ponds, using the brush to create a dead hedge on the woodland edge on the far side of the Settlement Ponds.

This project has now been completed and a detailed project report can be found on our website ([www.kemerton.com/news](http://www.kemerton.com/news)). By restoring the reedbeds and grassland, the project will benefit wildlife including the nationally scarce Dingy Skipper, which is found on the grassland, and birds such as Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting which nest in the reedbeds. Ongoing rotational management including scrub clearance and sapling removal will continue on the site to maintain these habitats into the future.

This project was part-funded by a grant of £2417.74 funding from the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered in partnership between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, as well as an additional £2000 grant from The Rowlands Trust. The Trust is very grateful to the Natural Networks Programme and The Rowlands Trust for their support.



Oystercatchers on gravel island, KLNLR, July 2020

# New Boat & Storage Facility Project Completed



## Community Fund

In July 2020 Kemerton Conservation Trust (KCT) was awarded £3600 funding for the purchase of a new boat and secure storage facility at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNR) from Severn Trent Community Fund. Work on the project began immediately and has now been completed.

Kemerton Lake consists of a mosaic of habitats, with the open water, small islands and large areas of reedbed an essential part of the habitat, providing nesting for Reed Bunting and Reed Warbler in the reedbeds and Oystercatcher on the islands, while the open water is used throughout the year by a wide

range of wetland birds and other wildlife such as grass snake, otter and dragonflies.

The Trust's new Heyland Neptune 250 boat is the perfect choice for carrying out vital habitat management on the lake, including managing the islands for waders and cutting back reeds, as well as carrying out water-based surveys and cleaning up litter from the water, as it is lightweight, stable and easy for one person to use. The secure container will allow us to safely store the boat and equipment close to the launch area, allowing our warden and volunteers quick and easy access when needed.

As part of the project delivery, our volunteers and warden prepared the container site by clearing scrub, while staff and machinery from Kemerton Estate helped to move the two ton container into place. We had hoped to hold a proper boat launch event but Covid-19 restrictions meant that only

Governor Matthew Darby, Warden John Threadingham and Project Manager Kate Aubury and her family could attend to mark the occasion.

We are very grateful for the support from Severn Trent Community Fund, which will allow us to continue our important management of this beautiful nature reserve for the benefit of both the wildlife that relies on it and the people who love to visit it.

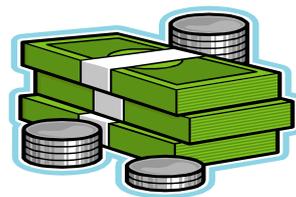
For more information about Severn Trent Community Fund visit their website [stwater.co.uk/communityfund](http://stwater.co.uk/communityfund)



Kate & family test out the new boat, KLNR, October 2020

## Funding Update

In the second half of 2020 we applied for one £500 grant, which was successful. The funder prefers to remain anonymous. The grant was used to purchase another tree popper for our volunteers to use at KLNR and Beggar Boys Wetland to remove willow and alder saplings from the reedbeds and lake margins. We now have enough tree poppers for a large work party to use and have been making good use of them since the work parties restarted in August 2020.



In September we sold an old manual tractor, which raised £500 towards our running costs. This proved useful as the East Hide repairs (see page X) were an unexpected expense.

We continued to see a rise in membership as more locals discovered our reserves during lockdown and wanted to support our work. We are delighted to welcome them.

Long-term local supporter Bredon Forest School donated another £1000 to the Trust in the second half of 2020., funds which go towards volunteer tools and materials etc. We are very grateful for their generous support.

We also received another £300 donation in September from Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust and we are very grateful for their continued support too.

**Thank you to all who have supported us so far this year!**

## KCT Governors' Annual Board Meeting 2020

At least once a year KCT Governors meet for a Board Meeting to review the past year's work and set goals for the new year. In addition to the governors the meeting is also attended by Pamela Clarke and Kate Aubury, who both report on their activities for the year. Normally the meetings are in person of course but in 2020 the Trust held the meeting on Zoom for the first time. Due to technical issues, a couple of governors could not join us.

Having sadly lost John Clarke at the end of 2019, the meeting included discussions about the future with Pamela, his wife and conservation assistant for many years, stepping up to continue the work as our new Conservation Advisor. The Governors were very grateful for her hard work at such a difficult time. Pamela is now leading on several monitoring projects.

Pamela and Kate reported on highlights from 2019/20 such as our successful grant applications and completion of phase one of the Natural Networks Project, as well as habitat management work on the reserves and the new management plan written for KLNR. Governors were updated on changes to Kemerton Estate's farming operation, which includes areas leased by KCT (see page 5 for more details), and Kate Aubury was elected as Company Secretary following the retirement of our previous Company Secretary. The ongoing vandalism issues on our sites was also discussed.

One significant new item on the agenda was the Covid-19 pandemic and how that was affecting the Trust's work and income. Thankfully we have been able to deliver the majority of our works, although the volunteer work party had to be suspended throughout the first lockdown and in order to keep

our Warden John safe some tasks had to be skipped this year, and our income is not expected to be negatively impacted, although there is a high level of uncertainty around that at this time. We ended 2019/20 with a higher surplus than budgeted and it was agreed to hold extra in hand for 2020/21 just in case.

After reviewing the past year, the governors identified their priorities for 2020/21; safe delivery of feasible activities during the pandemic, a project to monitor farming changes and the effect on wildlife, completing the Natural Network Project and other grant-funded projects.

The 2019/20 Chairman's Report, Annual Accounts, Conservation Advisor's Report and Support Coordinator's Report are all available to read on our website now in the 'News & Events' section.

### News in Brief

As a result of Covid-19, our Water's Edge Hide has sadly been closed to all visitors since late March last year. However, in late August vandals decided to take matters into their own hands and smashed in the door, causing damage to the doorframe of the hide. They also threw the two benches into the reedbeds and started a small fire in the centre of the hide floor, thankfully only singeing the wood.

Volunteer George Day spotted the damage on his daily walk and reported it immediately. We



Bench thrown in the reedbeds, KLNR, August 2020

fished the benches out of the lake and warden John used a short-term fix to secure the broken door. The Trust then arranged for a carpenter to replace the broken door frame. After hearing about the

incident, one of our members very generously sent in an extra donation towards the repairs, which was very kind.

The Trust deals with petty acts of vandalism throughout the year, which wastes our time and funds, but is sadly part and parcel of managing a site with public access. The police are aware of the ongoing issues and the community team patrol when they can but we also rely on our visitors to report issues if spotted. You can report any issues to Kate Aubury on [kate@kemerton.com](mailto:kate@kemerton.com), by phone 07765 334776 or via Messenger on our Facebook page.

## East and West Hides Reopen to Members at KLNR

During the first lockdown in March 2020, the Trust closed all bird hides at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNR) in line with government guidelines to limit the spread of Covid-19. Visitors were understandably disappointed but the Governors felt it was the responsible action to take and all similar organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts did likewise.

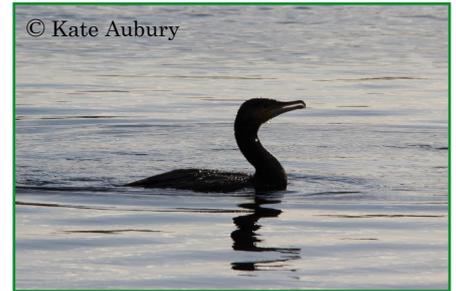
The hides remained closed through the summer, but with many restrictions lifted, bird hides at other reserves were reopening and our members were eager to see the same at Kemerton Lake. However, as a small volunteer-led organisation, the Trust was concerned about ensuring safe use of the hides for everyone, especially after Water's Edge Hide was vandalised whilst closed.

A decision was made to trial opening East and West Hide

to members only using the code locks already in use before lockdown, to ask members to follow rules such as one household only at any time, and if the initial trial went well, to continue on that basis as long as government guidelines did not require the hides to close again.

In late October, we emailed members to let them know and the trial began. Unfortunately, on re-opening the hides after minimal checks through the summer, we discovered that East Hide's roof had sprung a significant leak and the autumn rains were causing damage internally. We therefore had to temporarily close East Hide again whilst repairs were carried out by our warden (see below). Once that was done, the hide was again available for members to use.

Water's Edge Hide remains closed for the foreseeable future as it cannot be safely



© Kate Aubury  
Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*,  
KLNR, October 2020

opened to the general public and we are not allowed to open it to members only.

Since the trial started we have gone through lockdown two and are of course in lockdown three at present but the guidelines have not changed so we continue to allow members access. If any member does not know the code and wishes to use the hides, please email Kate on [kate@kemerton.com](mailto:kate@kemerton.com) and we will provide it.

As soon as it is safe to do so we look forward to reopening Water's Edge Hide for all our visitors.

## Large Leak Leads to Replacement Roof at East Hide

In late October we discovered that East Hide's roof had sprung a significant leak, which was causing damage to the hide interior and making the hide unusable. Warden John Threadingham carried out a prompt inspection and confirmed the roof was failing and needed replacing. The roof had lasted more than twenty years so it was time for a new one!

After informing our members and closing the hide, John got straight to work replacing the soggy roof.



© John Threadingham  
Replacing the roof at East Hide,  
December 2020

Working alone to avoid any risk from Covid-19, he removed the old roof, repaired some damaged roof purlins, fitted a plyboard underlayer and then installed

onduline sheeting for the top layer. The work was done over several days, and Kemerton Estate farm staff delivered the playboard to assist the Trust.

All wood was treated before installation and the interior was re-treated too. We estimate the new roof will last at least 15-20 years.

Thanks to John's hard work the East Hide is now watertight again and re-opened to members. We plan to replace West Hide's roof in 2021 as it's also showing signs of old age.

## Work Party Update by Graeme Bates

Having lived around the Tewkesbury area all my life I can remember when Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNR) was a working gravel pit. But it is only in the last few years that I have heard of Kemerton Conservation Trust.

My first visit to the lake was just after lockdown ended in May 2020 and I could not believe the variety of insects I found ( I am fascinated by invertebrates). I also noticed the signs saying that certain paths were for KCT members only. When I got home I looked up how to become a member and discovered that one option was to join the work party as a volunteer. I have always enjoyed outdoor work so I thought I would give it a try.

I emailed Kate in June but due to Covid-19 restrictions it was not until August that I attended my first work party at KLNR. It is always a bit worrying meeting people for the first time but I needn't have worried as Kate and the other volunteers made me very welcome and we spent the next three hours on what was possibly the hottest day of the year popping willow and alder saplings on the site.

Unfortunately I missed the next work party but was able to attend the October one at Beggar Boys Wetland. Talk about extremes - this time it was rain! After several very soggy (actually we got soaked) but not unpleasant hours raking up the hay, Kate gave us a tour of the site and its history.



Graeme (right) popping saplings, KLNR, August 2020

The December Work Party was in woodland on the hill, coppicing ash tree stumps. Though I knew about ash dieback I was shocked to see the damage it could do.

With the pandemic stopping most group activities it has been wonderful to be able to get outside, meet up with such friendly people and do something for the local wildlife. I am looking forward to the 2021 work parties though hopefully with better weather!



Mike with Curlew chicks ready to ring, field near Bredon, 2018

A lifelong ornithologist, Mike has been monitoring waders in the Severn & Avon Vales since 2002, when he was BTO Regional Representative for Gloucestershire. His work in this area brought him into contact with KCT (although he had worked with Chairman Adrian Darby before when they were both RSPB Trustees in the 1980s), as we own strips on some of the few remaining traditional Lammas Meadows locally where Curlew still breed successfully.

## Focus on a Friend: Mike Smart

Since then Mike has helped the Trust monitor birds on Twynning Ham, Upton Ham and Asham Meadow, advising us on ways to help breeding Curlew and working with other naturalists to set up Curlew Action Group locally. Mike has built up great relationships with local farmers, and has found that they derive as much pleasure as he does from Curlew on their land.

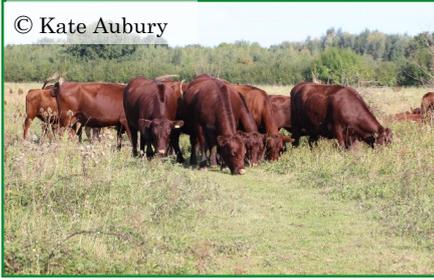
Mike credits his love of birds to a favourite Aunt who gave him, age 10, a copy of Arthur Ransome's 'Great Northern?' as a Christmas present, but it was his junior membership of Cheltenham and District Naturalists' Society (now Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society) that fed his interest, with field trips all across the county, learning from well-informed naturalists happy to share their knowledge. Mike has remained a member ever since and served as Chairman for GNS from 2003-2018.

Mike worked at Slimbridge for twenty years, followed by a seven year stint in Switzerland when he was Deputy Secretary-General of the International Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, but when he returned to Gloucestershire the plight of the Curlew soon became his focus, and he has devoted enormous time and energy to the subject. In his own words "there can be no greater highlight than seeing Curlew and hearing their wonderful song-flight in the breeding season".

As we head into 2021 Mike and his team of volunteers will be working with a number of like-minded groups in southern lowland England who together make up the Curlew Forum ([www.curlewcall.org](http://www.curlewcall.org)) as they roll out a project begun in 2019, protecting curlew nests and monitoring them more closely. KCT is delighted to take part and continue working with Mike.

## Changes in Arable and Grassland Management at Kemerton Estate - by Conservation Advisor Pamela Clarke

© Kate Aubury



Red Polls grazing Lake Meadow, KLNR, September 2020

A few people have asked me about the changes to fields on Kemerton Estate and want to learn more it. So, here goes;

In 2020 the management of arable land on the estate here was taken over by Overbury Enterprises – with its farm manager, Jake Freestone – and new regenerative farming practices were brought in. These place the health of the soil at the heart of everything. Zero till (already practiced at Overbury) aims to disturb the soil as little as possible. Fields here are no longer ploughed, averting the loss of soil through erosion, whilst at the same time allowing for an increase in earthworms and invertebrates. This in turn benefits, amongst others, the seriously declining numbers of farmland bird species.

With government pledges to reduce greenhouse gases, various methods are now being incorporated on farms. You may have seen some fields (echoing vistas of the South France!) planted up with a colourful mix of Sunflower, Maize, Oat, Pea, Sainfoin, Flax, Buckwheat, Crimson Clover, Phacelia and Vetch. One of the benefits of this cover crop is the plants capture carbon from the atmosphere and store it in their roots. Their diversity is also important in providing

pollen and nectar sources. Some of these fields will be left for the plants to die back and will then be direct drilled with whatever cash crop is required.

Another method of adding organic material into the soil is using cover crops as ‘green manure’ to improve the soil whilst also providing habitat and food for wild birds. Plants such as mustards, turnips and radishes grow fast in the autumn providing good ground cover, improving soil structure and mitigating against any leaching or run-off. Sometimes cover crops like stubble turnips have the added use that they can be fed to the sheep.

Companion crops are those which are grown to protect the cash crop. For instance, buckwheat is now being planted with rape; the plant initially grows well above the emerging rape and the flea beetle when it arrives is attracted to it rather than the rape which it will decimate. Buckwheat with its many white flowers attracts insects including pollinators and also suppresses weeds (including black grass which can be a real pest).

Another change is that the grass fields here are now managed for the estate by Rob Havard, an organic farmer and freelance ecologist who is committed to managing livestock for the benefit of cattle and the environment. Rob runs his own pedigree herd of Aberdeen Angus at Phepson Farm and at Croome Court where he has a tenancy. At Kemerton he manages the

beautiful herd of Red Poll cattle which have been on the estate for three generations. The holistic system of grazing which Rob has introduced here involves a ‘mob-grazing’ regime, with the cattle being moved every 2-3 days across the grass fields on the estate throughout the year. This prevents overgrazing whilst allowing the grasses and herbs more time to rest and regrow, which increases the biodiversity so beneficial to wildlife and to insect populations in particular. In late summer some of you may have spotted the Red Polls in the marshy area at KLNR. They remained for nearly a week – the size of the site allowing for this longer period – and they did a great job of opening up areas, benefitting a variety of wildlife.

KCT is fortunate to have a volunteer, Ray Thomas, who will be looking at the implications of this regime on populations of invertebrates in cow dung. Whilst this intrepid research might not appeal to you (!) there are other opportunities to study the effects of these changes in land use on wildlife species (particularly farmland birds). If anyone would like to get involved, please contact me on [pmclarke12@btinternet.com](mailto:pmclarke12@btinternet.com) or 01386 725547.



© Pamela Clarke

Cover crops flowering in Wiseacres, July 2020

## News from the Carrant Catchment Area Restoration Project - by Joanne Leigh, FWAGSW

The summer and autumn of 2020 was a difficult time for us all; we have learned many lessons over the last year and one of them is supply chains! We all struggled to get the basic goods we needed at the start of lockdown so we are taking this to the next level with a new partnership group. We will tell you all about it in the coming months, but for now we are seeking farmers to participate in a county wide research project, mapping primary habitats across the farm.

This last year CCARP has put on online events that support habitat recovery on farms, we hope that once mobile again, we can return to our 'on farm' events and follow up on these super webinars. We covered many topics but here are some highlights from winter 2020: Farming for Carbon, a talk with Nick Woodyatt from the Aiva group, which was all about how to start the journey of storing carbon whilst farming crops (we will be following up this year with more talks on this process). The wonderful group, West Midland Bird Ringers, gave us a thorough talk on thermal bird imaging. They are a

group of keen bird taggers who use up to date monitoring equipment to find and tag birds in the dark. We are very excited to go out in the spring to see what winter migrant birds we have on Bredon Hill and how we can farm to keep those numbers strong! We hosted the wise and calming words of Holly Beckett from Focused Farmers, a Nuffield scholar whose studies help farmers keep a focus on their work and improve business by introducing the four pillars of emotional intelligence. We carried out three workshops with support from our other facilitation groups across Gloucestershire and continue to clock in daily to strengthen our farming focus. If you are a farmer who missed out on any of the training, please get in touch as we have recorded some of them and would really like to share the group's activities. We will continue to do online events in 2021.

Our connectivity goals will be ramped up this year as its our final year as a funded group. It is never too late to join us so if you need help with Countryside Stewardship or are interested in our other activities please get in touch.



Redwing in Lillans Orchard, one of the winter migrants on Bredon Hill

Finally, an exciting project has emerged for the winter of 2020/21, supported by the Environment Agency. We will be implementing lots of natural flood management features on Bredon hill to slow water flows and reduce flooding in the lower vale with our fabulous farmers. We are hoping to carry out walks with parish councils to help map the issues and opportunities so that we are better prepared and can try to tackle the issues before they become problems. There is still time to get involved in this project so please get in touch to put forward information about flooding in your village.

Further information on joining our group can be found at [www.FWAGSW.org.uk](http://www.FWAGSW.org.uk) or by emailing Joanne [Joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk](mailto:Joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk).

## Moth Trapping Night Reveals Over 150 Species

In August 2020 KCT held a second moth trapping night using our new kit, this time at Oathill Track above Westmancote. Kate was again joined by Friend of KCT Gavin Peplow and Oliver Wadsworth, both very



Gold Spot *Plusia festucae*,  
Oathill Track, August 2020

experienced moth trappers, and with six traps set up along the track more than 150 different moth species were identified. A very successful night! This year we hope to hold a member moth night, dependent on Covid rules.

## Kemerton Clippings January 2021

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For more information on the work of KCT please visit our website: [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org)

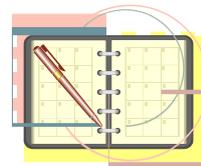


Lesser Marsh Grasshopper *Chorthippus albomarginatus*, Beggarboys Wetland, 310820

## Save the Date!

- **Saturday 30th January** - Working party (10am start, KLNR)
- **Saturday 27th February** - Working party (10am start, Beggarboys Wetland)
- **Saturday 27th March** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 18th April** - **Dawn Chorus Walk, Aldwick Wood** (5.45am start) - see 'News & Events' on website [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org) for full event details
- **Saturday 24th April** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 22nd May** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Sunday 13th June** - **Orchid Walk, KLNR** (2.30pm start)) - see 'News & Events' on website [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org) for full event details
- **Saturday 3rd July** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 31st July** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)

For details on any of the above events, please contact KCT Support Coordinator Kate Aubury by email [kate@kemerton.com](mailto:kate@kemerton.com) or by phone on 07765 334 776.



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