



KCT Hoping to Conserve Crucial Curlew Habitat



© Kate Aubury

Upham Meadow SSSI after haymaking, August 2022

KCT is excited to announce we are purchasing additional land at Upham Meadow SSSI near Twyning thanks to the support of six generous funders including Build Back Better from Gloucestershire County Council, waste management company Grundon through the Landfill Communities Fund, The Rowlands Trust and The Summerfield Trust. The Trust successfully bid for the parcels in 2022 and final conveyancing is currently underway.

The Trust has received £11,000 of grants towards the purchase of 3 parcels of flood meadow totalling 16 acres on the Avon riverbank near Twyning. Upham Meadow SSSI is an example of a riverside meadow still managed under the old “Lammas Meadow” system. Lammas meadows are shut up for hay in early spring, cropped in June/July, and grazed after Lammas Day on 1st August. Nutrients are supplied by flooding episodes in winter. This unique system results in a rich and characteristic meadow flora in late spring/early summer, dominated by the maroon flowered greater burnet in June, and provides vital nesting habitat for curlews and skylarks.

Such meadows are singled out in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a special type of Lowland Meadow because less than 3,700 acres (1,500 ha) of flood meadow now exist in

the UK. It is vital that the few remaining examples such as Upham Meadow SSSI are preserved and protected. KCT is therefore very grateful to Build Back Better from Gloucestershire County Council, Grundon Waste Management through the Landfill Communities Fund, The Rowlands Trust, The Summerfield Trust and two other funders for supporting our purchase of this valuable habitat to manage for future generations.

This new land complements our existing meadow parcels at Upham Meadow SSSI, Upton Ham SSSI and Asham Meadow, and will be managed in the same way as these sites. Upham Meadow is one of the last lowland strongholds of the red data listed European Curlew, and we work closely with partner organisations and other local landowners to monitor and protect these birds, and these additional parcels will help in that work.

Upham Meadow SSSI is situated on the bank of the Avon River near Twyning. It has a public footpath along the riverbank, and boats can moor alongside the Meadow. In summer it is a popular walk for locals, while fishermen and boaters use the riverbank, in winter it is a crucial natural flood defence for the local area, spending much of the winter underwater when river levels rise.



© Kate Aubury

Upham Meadow SSSI under water during winter floods with Bredon Hill in the background, February 2014

Fish & Aquatic Plants Survey Project Delivers Data



© Kate Aubury
Native water lilies acclimatising in the lake, KLNLR, August 2022

The Fish and Aquatic Plants Survey Project, which began in April 2022, was completed on time and on budget in October 2022. The fish and aquatic plants surveys that were carried out during the project has given us a much better understanding of the lake's fish populations and the impact of the invasive Nuttall's Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii* on the native aquatic plants that were in the lake prior to its arrival.

The fish survey, which was carried out by Fishtrack in April 2022, highlighted very low fish populations, with only 3-Spined Stickleback found in reasonable numbers. There was no sign of the original Roach or Rudd, but

the surveyors did find a small number of non native Brown Goldfish, likely dumped illegally. The low numbers were a concern and the surveyors highlighted the lack of good quality fish refuges in the lake as one reason for low stocks—as there are a large number of fish predators, fish need hiding spots to prevent over-fishing.

The aquatic plant survey, which was carried out by botanists Will Watson and Giles King-Salter in May and August 2022, confirmed our fears that Nuttall's Waterweed has swamped the native water plants, with very few of the aquatic species recorded before the plant arrived being found. The survey did confirm the site has an excellent range of native marginals (plants that grow along the edge of the lake) that are creating great habitat.

Finally, volunteer Sarah Dugate used her drone to take aerial photos of the lake in October 2022 (after nesting season) to help us understand the spread of Nuttall's across the whole water-body. The footage clearly showed that the waterweed had spread

throughout the lake in depths between 0.25-2m, while very shallow and deep areas were still clear.

The data collected during this project has highlighted work needed to improve the water habitat. A follow-up project has just started (see page 3).

Our thanks to Highfields Trust CIO and the Gordon Gray Trust for generously supporting this project through their grants. We would also like to thank Broadway Natural History Society for their donation to the project.

A full project report is available on our website.



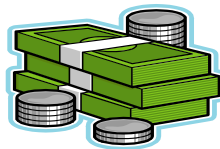
© Sarah Dugate

Drone footage showing extensive waterweed cover, KLNLR, September 2022

Funding Update

In the second half of 2022 we successfully applied for funding from the Natural Networks Programme for our aquatic project at KLNLR (see page 3). Three more grant applications for the project have been submitted, one was rejected and two are pending.

As part of our exciting new land purchase we completed 15 grant applications. To date 6 have been successful, five were unsuccessful and 4 are still



pending (see front page).

Long-term local supporter Bredon Forest School donated another £1500 to the Trust in the second half of 2022, funds which go towards volunteer tools and materials etc. We are very grateful for their generous support.

We also received another very

generous £200 donation in October from Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust.

An Ecclesiastical Insurance employee kindly nominated us for a £200 donation, which will be put towards a new project currently in planning.

Finally, local group 'Rather Be Canicrossing' also kindly donated £50 from one of their monthly challenges to us.

Thank you to all who have supported us this year!

Natural Networks Funding Secured for Aquatic Project at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve



© Kate Aubury

Kingfisher with Stickleback, KLNR, August 2022

Kemerton Conservation Trust is delighted to announce it has successfully bid for £2307.03 funding from the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered in partnership between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. The funding contributes to an important programme of aquatic habitat restoration and creation at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. Work on the project started in December 2022 and will be completed by April 2023.

Kemerton Lake is a beautiful reserve with a mosaic of habitats including the lake itself, as well as reedbeds, ponds, woodland and limestone grassland. It is well known for its wetland birds, including Kingfisher and Great Crested Grebe, as well as other species dependant on the aquatic habitats, such as dragonflies and Otter. In recent years the lake habitat has degraded because of an invasive non-native Nuttall's Waterweed, which has out-competed native wetland plants and impacted on fish and other aquatic species. Recent surveys also highlighted a lack of fish refuges in the lake, which was leading to overfishing by Otter, Cormorant and Heron.

Funding from the Natural Networks programme, together with KCT's own funds and other funders if additional applications are successful, will allow the Trust to use local contractors CRC Ecology, who are wetland habitat restoration specialists, to under-

take a programme of works including trialling manual waterweed removal, creating new fish refuges using stone filled gabions, felled trees and terracotta pipe, replanting with native aquatic plants and installing tern rafts to hopefully encourage Common Tern to nest at the lake. Our volunteers will also be involved throughout; our Support Coordinator Kate Aubury will be managing it and our warden John Threadingham will assist with habitat works onsite, supported by our wonderful work party volunteers.



© Kate Aubury

Nuttall's Waterweed in the lake, KLNR, August 2022

News in Brief

In September KCT hosted a visit from Bredon Brownies at Kemerton Lake. The guided walk was originally planned for July but had to be rescheduled due to the heatwave. A group of enthusiastic girls joined Support Coordinator Kate Aubury and her daughter Lottie for a ramble around the Settlement Ponds and through the woodland, spotting insects, birds and even the odd frog and taking a closer look at some of the critters with the help of bug spotter pots and magnifying glasses. Kate also



© Kate Aubury

Otter kit in the water, KLNR, January 2023

told them a bit more about how the Trust manages the land to make it a wildlife haven and the girls discussed things they could do to help wildlife in their own gardens.

Throughout 2022 there have been regular brief sightings of otter at the lake, but just before Christmas visitors started seeing a group of otters on a daily basis. In early January Kate popped to the hides to see them herself. We believe it is a mother and 2 kits, based on behavior, and they appear very happy at the lake. It is clear from the successful hunts that they are finding fish, but we are mindful of the low numbers seen during our recent survey and hope our fish refuges will allow fish populations to cope.

KCT Governors' Annual Board Meeting 2022

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.

Pamela and Kate reported on



© Kate Aubury

KCT Governors looking at grassland flora, Lake Meadow, July 2022

highlights from 2021/22 such as successful fundraising for new projects at John Moore Nature Reserve, KLNR and commencement of the John Clarke Memorial Walk, as well as survey results and bird ringing beginning at KLNR.

After reviewing the past year, the governors identified their priorities for 2022/23; fundraising for and completing the purchase of land at Upham Meadow, focussing on aquatic habitat improvements at KLNR, and researching ways to offset the loss of farming subsidies as a result of Brexit.

After the meeting the group was joined by Kemerton Estate's Cattle Manager Rob

Havard to take a walk through wood pasture and limestone grassland on the estate and at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve to see how the new mob grazing regime was benefitting flora and fauna. Rob explained some of the benefits of the new system and the Governors enjoyed the many wildflowers in bloom in Lake Meadow. The water-based improvements planned in 2023 were also discussed while onsite.

The 2021/22 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.

How our Volunteer Work Parties Help our Habitats

Once a month on a Saturday our intrepid volunteer work party group meets up and heads out to KCT's reserves or land we help to manage to carry out essential habitat management.

As a small charity we rely on our volunteers hugely to make what we do possible. We are very lucky to have a volunteer Warden, John Threadingham, who does a lot of the day to day habitat management and maintenance, but for some jobs we need more manpower. That is where the volunteer work party group comes in, helping us to complete larger tasks in one session, or tackle jobs that John does not have time to get done. The group also helps in project delivery. The jobs and locations vary each month, and our volunteers get to work in

areas that are not open to the public, and learn more about the conservation work we do.

In the last twelve months the volunteer work party group has helped in many ways. Here's some of the tasks;

- Assisted in delivery of the John Moore NR Woodland Restoration Project by laying the new wood chip path, cutting back overgrown shrubs at the entrance and collecting old tree guards from within the wood.
- Helped John manage the Fleabane Meadow at Beggarboys by raking up and carrying off the hay after mowing.
- Maintained paths for visitors to KLNR by cutting back encroaching vegetation in the summer.
- Handpulled Ragwort on our land at Upham Meadow to

make the hay safe for cows without using sprays on the wildflower-rich flood meadow.

- Supported contractor work at KLNR to minimise costs to the Trust.

We are always looking for more volunteers to join our crew, if you are interested in finding out more please contact Support Coordinator Kate Aubury by email kate@kemerton.com.



© Kate Aubury

Volunteers cutting back shrubs at John Moore NR, March 2022

An Update on Wildlife Surveys Carried Out in 2022 - by Conservation Advisor Pamela Clarke



© George Day

Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*, KLNLR

Year end is a time to review the results of ongoing wildlife surveys carried out by KCT and I thought we'd highlight some of 2022's data here.

At Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNLR) the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) continues monthly. The national WeBS count scheme was initiated in 1947 to monitor the impact of the development of wetlands in the UK and is now run by the BTO. Valuable records of internationally important non-breeding waterbirds (such as Snipe) are collected by groups of volunteers and provide data for conservation of populations and of wetland habitats in the UK. For many years Friend of KCT Rob Prudden faithfully

performed these surveys and a new volunteer, Juliet Vines, has now taken them on.

Butterfly transects across 4 sites on Kemerton Estate are each walked 4 times through the season by volunteer George Day. He noted that the start of the 2022 season was slow but by the end numbers had improved with Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Holly Blue doing well though not Common Blue. Dingy Skipper seems to have become successful – seen near the Settlement Ponds at KLNLR, as well as by Bredon Tower and on Westmancote Track on Overbury Estate.

Farmland birds such as Yellowhammer, Skylark and White-throat have been monitored at Kemerton since the 80s: these surveys are increasingly important as some species have declined dramatically – notably Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail and Tree Sparrow. Work is being done on the farm to help foster Skylark numbers with plots set up to encourage their breeding in 2023. Several

square plots within existing crops are left fallow until the crop is harvested leaving the birds free to nest.

Experts continue to help KCT with surveys, including moth trapping and dragonfly counts, and have hugely bolstered our species lists and knowledge of them. Glow-worm surveys did not produce good numbers in 2022 possibly because of recent hedge operations close to the transect or the summer's dry hot conditions.

Our enormous thanks to our various volunteers for all their help and enthusiasm.

Finally, the Bredon Hill villages which have been a hotspot for the Spotted Flycatcher now see numbers drastically reducing, so I'd like to see John's Spotted Flycatcher survey work continue. I am collecting a group of people from the villages who are happy to look for these charismatic birds which arrive in May. If you are familiar with the bird, please let me know if you'd like to be involved – thank you.

Dragonflies and Damselflies Delight on Lake Walk

On 21st August Dragonfly expert Mike Averill, who has been surveying *Odonata* on our wetland sites for many years, led a member-only walk at KLNLR focussing on these fantastic flying insects.

During a walk around the reserve Mike talked about the different species found on the site, their lifecycles and habitat requirements, and also gave tips on separating similar species in the field such as



© Kate Aubury

Small Red-eyed Damselfly mating, KLNLR, August 2022

Common & Ruddy Darter. Members enjoyed photographing some of the numerous species

we have at the lake, got a closer look at empty exuvia left behind by emerging adults, and watched mating and egg laying behaviour by Small Red-eyed Damselflies and Black-tailed Skimmer in particular. We also rescued a few individuals that had got stuck in mud on the edge of the lake.

Everyone had a wonderful time learning more about dragonflies and our grateful thanks to Mike for giving up his time to share his extensive knowledge.

Bird Ringing into the New Year: An Update



Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* in the hand,
KLNR, September 2022

A group of dedicated bird ringers from West Midlands Ringing Group, led by Fergus Henderson, have continued a programme of ringing birds at Kemerton Lake which started in early 2022. The ringing is part of the wider Bredon Hill Bird Recovery Project, funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

The team enjoyed a short break through the summer months when birds are busy feeding young but returned to regular sessions as we headed into autumn, when migration begins. This is an exciting time to be out ringing, with huge numbers of birds moving south from August to October,

and new arrivals coming in from September to November.

During the autumn peak the team caught and ringed 5 Kingfisher, including several juveniles. The high number came as a surprise to the Trust, and shows the details ringing can uncover. The highlight of the year was catching a Wryneck on its passage south! A new record for the reserve.

Ringing helped us to better understand how migrating species were using the site as they moved through in high numbers in September and October, highlighting the importance of certain linear hedges and scrub at the reserve. This important data is then fed into the ongoing habitat management.

As the weather turned colder, the focus switched to new birds arriving for the winter. At the nets Redwing, Redpoll, Stonechat, Starling and Meadow Pipit were caught while the team also started night thermal image surveys.

The target of these surveys were Woodcock, Snipe and Skylark. The first session went well, with Woodcock and Skylark seen. A thermal survey at Lake Meadow also confirmed Common Snipe in the scrapes but we were unable to get close enough to catch and ring. These surveys are still ongoing but soon the weather will warm up and the team will begin to focus on the spring migration.

Finally, the team has also erected some barn owl and kestrel boxes, made by ringer Nick Berry, which will be monitored for nesting pairs during the breeding season.

KCT is very grateful for the team's dedication and hard work and excited to see what the new year brings.



Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* in the hand,
KLNR, September 2022

Enjoying the Night Life: a Bat Walk at KLNR

On September 9th a group of members joined Support Coordinator Kate Aubury at sunset for a bat walk at KLNR and in the surrounding woodland. Conditions were good and Kate, who carries out bat surveys on Trust land, was hoping for a good number of species. The walk started with a general talk about UK bats and then the group headed off around the lake to see what bats were foraging. We

had a small number of bat detectors to share, in order to allow attendees to hear the echolocation bats make.

After a good start watching Common and Soprano Pipistrelles feeding over the reedbeds on the north edge of the lake, an electronic malfunction with Kate's bat detector caused issues and led to bats being missed as the group continued to the far

woodland. Luckily we had another detector which Kate was able to use for the final stretch of the walk, and quite a number of bats were seen foraging in the treetops on South Ride, which meant the walk finished on a positive note. It is always frustrating when things don't go to plan but all the attendees made the best of it and we appreciate their understanding and enthusiasm!

KLNR and Kemerton Wood Forestry Works Update

In September last year, KCT temporarily closed the Lake Walk at KLNR to carry out essential woodland management. Works were expected to last 4-6 weeks but were unfortunately delayed by machinery problems and bad weather. Frustratingly, the path has had to remain closed throughout the winter, but will be reopened as soon as safety and ground conditions allow.

The main purpose of these works is 'thinning'. Standard forestry practice is for woodland to be planted at high densities and then thinned periodically. Dense planting encourages straight trees which grow quickly, while stifling competition from brambles and other rank vegetation. However, over time, trees will start to compete with and suppress each other. Selective thinning is needed to ensure that remaining trees have sufficient resources to develop normally. This cycle is repeated periodically (typically every 15 years), until the woodland is mature. The northern end of the Lake Walk was

planted in 1989 and is undergoing its second thinning. This cycle can be very beneficial for wildlife. Increased light to the woodland floor enables flora and the next generation of tree saplings to become established.

Visitors may have spotted more forestry works being carried out at Upstones between KNLR and Bredon in woodland owned by Kemerton Estate and managed for wildlife by KCT. This block of woodland was planted in 1981 with ash, wild cherry, European larch and non-native *Nothofagus* species. Sadly, almost all of the ash is now dying from Chalara Ash Dieback, while the larch is very vulnerable to windthrow and the *Nothofagus* has become an invasive pest. Most of the large trees are therefore being removed, leaving only cherry and some of the healthier ash. The area will be replanted with a wide variety of native trees and shrubs which should provide much more disease-resilient woodland in future. The ash stumps will regenerate as coppice stools, but most are expected to die from Chalara within a year or two.



© Kate Aubury

Ash logs after felling, Kemerton Wood, January 2023

Chalara is a horrendous problem throughout the locality. Once infected, ash trees invariably die from the disease, although some – particularly larger – trees may survive for five years or more. On Kemerton Estate pre-Chalara, nearly half of all trees were ash. An estimated several million trees, saplings and seedlings have died or are dying from the disease. The estate's policy is to fell or pollard any diseased ash located near roads or busy footpaths (for safety reasons). Elsewhere, dying ash are left in situ, provided there are other trees to take their place. It is hoped that natural resistance to the disease will develop over time, but for this to happen, the most resistant trees must be retained for as long as possible to set seed.

A Few Finds from our Fungus Foray

On 13th November the Trust held a member-only fungus foray to The Bushes SSSI and Aldwick Wood SSSI on Bredon Hill, led by KCT's fungus recorder Kate Aubury.

After a very dry autumn, the season started slowly so there were very few grassland fungi to find as the group headed up the hill. Fresh cow pats proved the most fruitful habitat with Petticoat Mottlegill, Snowy Inkcap, Yellow Fieldcap and Stubble Rosegill all spotted in good numbers. The limestone



Yellow Fieldcap *Bolbitis titubans*

grassland in The Bushes yielded a few interesting finds including Snowy Waxcap and an *Entoloma* species, while Glistening Inkcap, Jelly Ear and Candlesnuff were

spotted on rotting deadwood at the woodland edge. Sadly the path into the woods was blocked by a recently fallen tree so the group could not explore as planned, but the dry conditions suggested finds would have been slim anyway. Some tiny *Mycena* species were spotted on the woodland floor and a good display of Poplar Fieldcap was a nice surprise as well.

Overall it was an underwhelming show from the fungi but the lovely weather was a plus, we had a nice ramble up the hill and attendees finished with a new appreciation for cow dung!

Kemerton Clippings January 2023

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For more information on the work of KCT please visit our website: www.kemerton.org



© Kate Aubury

Blackcap male *Sylvia atricapilla*, KLNLR, September 2022 (bird ringing session)

Save the Date!

- **Saturday 7th January** - Working party (10am start, KLNLR)
- **Saturday 4th February** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 4th March** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Thursday 9th March** - 'An Admiration for Aculeates' Slideshow & Talk, Beckford Village Hall (7.30pm start) - see 'News & Events' on website www.kemerton.org for full event details
- **Saturday 8th April** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Friday 28th April** - Member-only Curlew Walk, Upham Meadow SSSI (10.30am start) - see 'News & Events' on website www.kemerton.org for full event details
- **Saturday 6th May** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 3rd June** - Working party (10am start, KLNLR)
- **Saturday 10th June** - KLNLR Open Day (Gates open at 11am, walks at 11.30am & 2pm) - see 'News & Events' on website www.kemerton.org for full event details
- **Sunday 2nd July**—Member-only Glow Worm Walk, Bredon Hill (9pm start) - see 'News & Events' on website www.kemerton.org for full event details
- **Saturday 8th 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 or by phone on 07765 334 776.

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