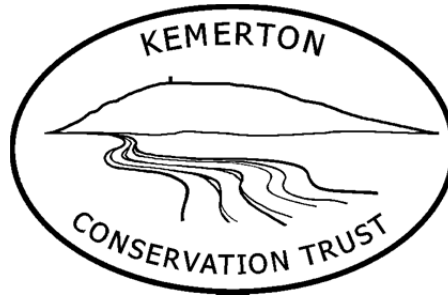


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# **Kemerton Conservation Trust**

## **Report from Kate Aubury Support Coordinator**

**October 2012-October 2013**

## **Overview**

The last twelve months have been very busy from my point of view. I have continued administering the Friends scheme, supervising the work parties, organising events, assisting in grant applications and carrying out bat and fungi surveys as in previous years. However, with John Clarke's gradual cutting back of hours and the arrival of our new warden John Threadingham, I am also now more involved in helping organise the reserve management work schedule. I have also taken over project management of the Ash Bed Trial, am assisting with the Woodland Shrub and Wildflower Project and have been involved in the Higher Level Stewardship Special Projects. Whilst some of this additional work is carried out in my role as office administrator for Kemerton Estate, inevitably much of it is completed in my spare time and it is becoming very difficult to manage it all. I feel a lack of staff resource is now a major hindrance in the Trust taking on new projects and would like the situation to be reviewed in the Governors meeting. However, despite this lack of resource, a lot was still achieved in the last year and below is a more in-depth look at all the activities I was involved in.

## **Friends of KCT Scheme**

The overall Friends scheme numbers are unchanged in the last 12 months. We have 160 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 160 and 7 respectively in 2011/13). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors than volunteers (108) than volunteers (52).

This year, we recruited a reasonable number of new members but we also lost more members than in previous years so our renewal rate has slipped. We lost 25 members in the last 12 months including 2 who sadly passed away (as against 21 members lost in 2011/12). Of these 16 were donors and 9 were volunteers (as against 11 donors and 10 volunteers last year). 3 of the volunteers were younger members who have now gone to university. As we encourage participation by teenagers, this will inevitably contribute to a higher turnover on the volunteer side.

The new donors were mostly recruited at our events and talks throughout the year and most of the new volunteers came through our encouragement of younger volunteers, and in particular Duke of Edinburgh participants. As mentioned above, we see a fairly high turnover from the younger volunteers, but we usually get at least a year's volunteering and sometimes 2-3 before they head to university or move on to other things and my hope is that they will return to conservation later in life, having got a taste for it through our work. We have also benefited from continuing support from many of the parents, long after the kids have gone off to greener pastures, and many younger siblings have subsequently got involved too, so overall, the presence of young volunteers is a real positive for the Trust.

All members continue to receive the bi-annual newsletter, which is very well received and an important part of our communications with members. Approximately half of our members receive the newsletter as an e-pdf and half as a hard copy by post. I have been trying to obtain email details for more members, as it substantially cuts our costs throughout the year if communications can go by email and also allows us to send last minute event reminders too.

## **Volunteer Work Parties**

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

At the end of last year, we had seen a slight fall off in numbers, in part due to Alan Marsh's departure and also as a result of a number going off to university. However, we have now recruited quite a few more through advertising at events and word of mouth (including younger siblings getting involved), so average attendance is back up to approx. 12 per session.

I attended a brushcutter training course in November last year, which I successfully completed and I am now qualified to use the brushcutter at work parties if required. As John Threadingham took up the post of warden in December last year and attends most work parties, it has not been necessary for me to use the brushcutter thus far but it is a useful skill to have in reserve if necessary.

The work parties have continued to prove useful in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is general maintenance and habitat management on the reserves but we have also assisted with willow clearance as part of the HLS Special Project at KLNR and assisted with hay raking and carrying as part of the HLS Special Project at Beggar Boys Wetland Complex. We also raked and carried hay off Westmancote Banks (a small sensitive wildflower site on Bredon Hill) for Overbury Estate. Obviously working on wildlife projects with other landowners is a key aspect of the Trust's work, but it was also deeply satisfying for all of those involved to witness the subsequent fantastic display of flora and butterflies later in the summer as a result of our work.

I estimate that from March 2012 to March 2013, the volunteer work party donated approximately 297 hours of work worth £1537.50 to the Trust. (This figure excludes 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 last year we held a slideshow talk at Kemerton village hall which was given by Governor Dr Margaret Palmer and focussed on her battle to prove the native status of the British crayfish. This was followed by another slideshow talk in March with talks by both myself (on summer migrant birds) and by guest speaker Harry Green, one of the Trust's many expert recorders (on interesting invertebrates of Worcestershire). Both talks were well attended and proved successful.

I gave a talk on behalf of the Trust in January to the Probus Club of Tewkesbury, which went extremely well. We gained a new joint member as a result and I have now been asked to give a similar talk to their sister organisation next year.

Our annual Easter Egg Hunt was held in late March. The day was sunny and we had our best ever turnout of 70 children and made a profit. Although this event is always well attended, it takes a lot of time and effort to organise and never makes more than a small profit. Given my now over-stretched time resource, I have decided to put the event on hold for the moment and reassess in a year.

Our first member-only walk was in mid-May, when we took Friends to see the restoration work carried out at The Buses SSSI under Higher Level Stewardship. I co-led the walk with Matt, and we had a reasonable turnout on a lovely sunny day.

Also in May, my husband David & I attended WWT's Tiddesley Wood Annual Open Day with an exhibition and information stand. This was our third year at the event and we had another enjoyable day meeting people and telling them about the trust. Although we did not gain any new members or donations directly from this event, it helps to raise our profile in the area.

In early August I held another bat walk and talk for members at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. Although we only had 2 Friends attend this year (together with members of Worcestershire Bat Group) it proved a big hit with them, especially the 8 year old who loved using the bat detector! This is now an annual event and will, in 2014, be open to the general public as well as members.

In late August, Adrian and I co-led a member-only walk to Beggar Boys Wetland Complex to show off the restored habitat and highlight the additional HLS work being carried out there. A good number of Friends attended and with the help of one of our expert recorders, we had a fun afternoon identifying invertebrates and spotting rare plants. The member walks are a great opportunity to showcase the work we do on those reserves and managed areas that are not opened to the public.

Our annual Open Day was held in September this year, with a focus on fungi. Rather than rope in one of our visiting experts, we decided to utilise my growing knowledge on the subject to hold two guided 'fungal forays', with Adrian and Matt leading two general walks as well. In addition to the walks we had displays, refreshments and a nature trail for the kids. Volunteers assisted throughout the day. Numbers were about average at 50 odd, and we made just over £800 (including donations and new membership received on the day).

Finally, a few weeks ago we had the annual KOW Apple Day. This year we again had an information stand at the event, and it was a good opportunity to publicise our work further and talk to our members and locals. We spoke to lots of interested parties so it was successful from the Trust's point of view. Although we did not sign up any new members on the day, several interested parties left with membership forms so hopefully some will join soon.

All in all this year contained a packed and successful programme of events. I have now begun planning for next year, with one talk already booked in for spring.

### **Grant Applications**

Due to pressures of time, I only completed one grant application this year, which was for the Ash Bed Trial project. This was successful in gaining £500.00 for the works and the project has already started. I am project managing it and will write the final report when it completes next autumn.

Although it would be good to write a few more grant applications in 2013/14, we have to be realistic about what we can deliver on, given our stretched staff resources.

## **Bat and Fungi Surveys**

I have continued my programme of bat surveys for the trust in 2013, the fifth year the surveys have been conducted. Further monitoring of the Lesser Horseshow Colony has continued under NBMP as well. In December last year, I finally received my bat licence so am now fully qualified to carry out bat box checks and other conservation surveys. However, David Worley continues to assist me in the bi-annual bat box checks so I can learn from his experience.

With the funds allocated at the last governors' meeting, I expanded the bat box scheme from 14 to 42 boxes. The new boxes were erected at KLNR and Beggar Boys Wetland Complex. They were all onsite by the spring bat box check and have now been checked twice. I am delighted that one of the new boxes was found to contain two soprano pipistrelles when checked earlier this month and there is evidence some of the other boxes have been used by bats through the summer.

I have continued my fungi surveys this autumn, and after a late start due to the dry summer, the season is now in full swing and I am very busy! Although I still have a lot to learn on this complex kingdom, my knowledge continues to grow each season and I am gathering lots of valuable data on our sites, particularly KLNR.

All records from my bat and fungi surveys are sent to John for adding to Recorder.

## **Website**

The major update of the website has now begun, with the help of my husband David, our new volunteer website designer. The new pages will not go live until we have completed the majority of the update, so at present the old website remains in situ. Because I am writing the updated text in my spare time, Matt is checking and finalising it and then David has to upload it, the process is taking longer than I had hoped, but it should be live within 6 months.

## **Vandalism at KLNR**

We had several incidents of petty vandalism at KLNR earlier in the year. It was obvious that a group were using the East Hide as a meeting point and causing trouble whilst there. In liaison with the local police community support officer I arranged for additional surveillance from the police, put up signs warning of CCTV and asked all Friends to be vigilant and report any unusual activity or damage they spotted. In addition, John Threadingham repaired a gap in the fence and hedgerow by the road which we believe the vandals were using to access the hide. Although it is always possible further incidents could occur, we have not had any more issues since these actions were taken so we believe they had an effect. The Trust is grateful to PCSO Simon Williams for his advice and time of this matter.

## **Conclusion**

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank David, who has continued to assist me at every event, attend every work party and accompany me on all bat surveys. His support has been invaluable to me this year as always and I could not achieve half of what I do without his unstinting assistance.