

Kemerton Conservation **Trust**

Report from John Clarke

November 2006 - October 2007

Health and Safety

There have been no major Health and Safety problems. Minor damage to the footpath and to fencing has been repaired promptly. Regular checks have been made of life saving equipment and warning signs. The main access gate area has been cleaned regularly and encroaching vegetation cut back.

Website

I am hoping that by the time that this report goes out my text revisions will have been loaded. Matthew has some changes to the format that he wishes to make and hopefully these will also be incorporated.

Over the past year the website has received about 25 visits per week. This may not at first appear to be many but the figure has improved from less than 5 a week in the past and up from 10 per week last year. Furthermore the visits generate a lot of contacts, with enquiries about all aspects of the orchards as well as the lake reserve and arable wildflowers etc.

The site continues to get only positive and often extremely complimentary feedback.

Jim Verrechia continues to manage the site as his contribution to the work of the Trust.

Recorder

With the help of Pamela Clarke the backlog of data entries was cleared early in 2007. There will be far less data to load for this year (see Monitoring) and it should be completed early in 2008.

We continue to work closely with Worcestershire Biological Records Centre and both Adrian and myself are members of Worcestershire Recorders.

Monitoring

I am afraid that very little wildlife monitoring has been possible this year owing to my health problems and the loss of Clive Cleaver who completed his training – he used to ferry me to sites that required checking and monitoring. The only sites that I have

been able to visit this year are some of the orchards and the lake. This means that around 20 sites that would normally have been checked have been neglected. I am hopeful that some transport can be found so that I (or Pamela and I) can do some catching up next year.

To summarise:

1. General day-to-day observations were very restricted.
2. Sites visited limited to three or four.
3. Annual monitoring of key bird species across the estate – cancelled.
4. Specific monitoring of practical trials – limited to the Lake

At the Lake I have now established a small team of experts who visit on a voluntary basis. The birds are surveyed weekly – in addition to monthly wetland bird surveys. Bad weather forced the county dragonfly recorder to cancel planned visits. However, two members of Worcestershire Recorders visited twice to survey hymenoptera and a new contact carried out an initial survey of moths. The latter is hoping to make several visits next year.

After a bumper year last year the number of breeding Reed Warblers dropped to 27 while Reed Bunting dropped to 3 pairs. High numbers of Reed Bunting used the reeds as winter roosts whilst the number of Starlings roosting there increased to c.7000.

Hundreds of ‘loafing’ non-breeding gulls predated most ground nests and chicks on the water. I understand that the gulls have moved to Kemerton Lake after being ‘discouraged’ at other local sites. We have always had a problem with predation by corvids (although this can be partially managed by culling) but the severe problem this year resulted in no wader chicks fledging and most ducklings being predated.

Orchards

During the winter I arranged for a contractor to bottom prune the young trees in the Lillans Orchard. Stuart Worrall, who worked unpaid full-time for KCT for almost two years after graduating some ten years ago, and his brother have now set up their own business so it was a good chance to support their initiative.

During the winter Kemerton Orchard Workers (KOW) planted several trees in gaps in Daffurns Orchard. We have a few more to go in this winter and that should complete the restoration.

Early in the year I was contacted by Gardeners’ World from BBC Television who wanted to look at filming a traditional orchard. After an initial visit and trial filming they returned in spring to film Daffurns Orchard, together with me and members of KOW. The piece is to be used as part of a series next spring encouraging viewers to plant orchards.

In May members of the International Society of Arboriculture visited Daffurns Orchard.

KOW members have produced a 2008 calendar for Daffurns Orchard – proceeds to go towards their costs.

A lecturer from Pershore College provided what should be the final session of training – the pruning of older trees after restoration work – in Daffurns Orchard.

By far the most exciting news is that we are now marketing fruit from The Lillans Orchard and the Walled Garden. I was contacted by a company running a vegetable-box scheme and after initial discussions and site visits referred them to Adrian and Peter. The large number of varieties of apple in the orchards ripen over a long period, which suits the company as they can pick fresh fruit weekly thus reducing storage space. The farm has now applied to the Soil Association for organic status for The Lillans, the Walled Garden, Grange Orchard and Upstones Orchard. Grange Orchard has been planted up with young trees and with careful management they should be cropping well within five years and the fruit will also be bought by the vegetable-box company. The farm will have the income for the fruit and as I understand it will pay KCT for it's ongoing work. Despite the poor yield this year the fruit was being harvested/sold at about 100 kilos per week.

Furthermore, a local cider producer has shown interest in the cider apple section of the Lillans Orchard. Cropping was poor this year as the whole orchard is in need of regular pruning. I believe that the farm has found a contractor to do the work.

More recently I met with the manager of the nursery at Pershore College and we are to supply them with grafting material as they wish to extend their range of apple varieties preferring to use a local source.

Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

The trainee left in December and since then I have relied heavily on two local volunteers – Alan Marsh and Andy Hull - who find time to carry out Health and Safety checks, maintenance and repair work and some habitat management. The Trust is deeply indebted to them (see later).

Adrian has been successful in obtaining a further grant from the ALSF fund (via Natural England). This time the grant covers from June 2007 – March 2008. The main thrust of the application was to seek support to increase public access to the reserve by extending the permissive path through the arboretum. Money was also allocated for the recruitment of a 'Support Co-ordinator'. Kate Aubury grew up in Kemerton and now works in PR. Funds were provided to help her improve local awareness of the work of KCT, and to recruit a pool of volunteers to work on projects that Kate will organise or to help Alan and Andy on larger jobs. She is also seeking financial support from local people and businesses. I have been providing her with training about the work of the Trust and some habitat management and this will continue into next year. Kate has organised an Open Day at the lake and local

villagers are invited. There will be morning and afternoon sessions when visitors will be escorted around the reserve to look at our work and hear about the wildlife found there. At least eight of us will be on hand to explain how the reserve has developed since the quarry company left in October 1997. Guides will include Adrian, Pamela and myself plus voluntary workers Kate, Alan and Andy – and two local experts who carry out voluntary wildlife recording for us – so guests should get a good insight into the reserve, its management and what we all do there. I am hoping that the MD of the quarry company will join us.

With regard to the practical trials – the **winter bird feeding trials** were abandoned last year - due to a lack of communication between myself and the estate no suitable cover was available.

The **leaf litter trials** continued at the lake but I was unable to carry out regular monitoring – although I did confirm Anemone as a new species.

The **mining bee trials** continued, thanks to visits by members of the Worcestershire Recorders. I made one visit to collect specimens and managed to arrange a minimal amount of habitat management so the work can continue next year. Geoff Trevis and I produced a paper about this project and he has given a presentation to BWARS (Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society) prior to it being submitted for publication.

Greenhouse and Nursery

I still retain a number of trees and seedlings for the arboretum scheme.

I mentioned in last year's report that I would try to use the former tree nursery area to grow arable wildflowers to obtain fresh stock. I did clear the ground and a volunteer helped me to sow some seed. However, illness prevented me from continuing and the volunteer did not maintain the area so the trial failed. However, I have told Kate that I could use a gardener-volunteer to try again next year. Pamela and I did manage to collect seed from a few plants that appeared elsewhere.

Nestboxes

Thanks to several volunteers, replacement nest boxes were made and many of the remaining boxes were visited and cleaned out. I need to acquire suitable timber to build more replacements and the volunteers have offered to repeat the exercise this winter.

John Moore Reserve

Earlier in the year part of a tree fell across the access to the reserve but I managed to get it cleared. A local volunteer has been cutting the ride and the notice board has been updated regularly. Near the gate the ground is rough and rutted where vehicles

access nearby land via the reserve. The summer floods eroded some of this and it could now do with building up again using suitable spoil or other material.

2007 is the centenary year of John Moore's birth. There is an exhibition at the John Moore Museum in Tewkesbury and I am to produce text for a poster telling visitors about the reserve.

Beggarboys Wetland Reserve

I have been unable to visit the reserve at all this year and until I can get there with some volunteers no management will be possible.

The leak has still not been repaired.

To maintain this reserve, so rich in wildlife (see previous reports where I emphasise the important wildlife value of this site), it is necessary to carry out a considerable amount of habitat management work. Whilst missing one year is not disastrous it will take much more effort to complete the work once we can get volunteers and machinery to the site.

Education/PR

The website continues to provide information, education and publicity.

Last year I suggested that copies of my report should be made available to local people and the governors agreed. I gave copies to members of the local Parish Council, WI and KOW to pass around their members. Feedback was very positive and appears to have stimulated considerable interest in the work of KCT. I hope we can do this on a regular basis.

I mentioned earlier that Daffurns Orchard is to feature on Gardeners' World (BBC Television) next spring. Filming went on for several hours but will be edited down to around 4 minutes so most of us who took part are wondering whose contribution finished up on the editor's floor!

Adrian hosted a visit by staff from The Joint Nature Conservation Committee – the body that advises government on conservation issues.

Peter hosted a visit by local farmers to look at the arable conservation headlands and Roundhill grassland. I believe that there was another visit but cannot find details of it.

Since Kate joined us she has organised the Open Day and an open meeting at the village hall.

I had to refuse a number of requests for visits but where possible provided information about where certain areas are accessible/visible from footpaths.

Practical Trials

Woodland leaf litter trials, **mining bee habitat** trials and **winter bird feeding** trials have been covered in the section on Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve.

Last year I was approached by Sue Chandler (a local resident) about **Glow-worms**, which she had often seen during evening walks on Bredon Hill. I asked her if she was willing to carry out a basic survey (ie presence/absence) along a transect and she agreed to do it this year. In fact, she has done a great deal more – walking the transect and mapping the insects on a weekly basis between late June and mid-October. We intend compiling a report on her findings. Next year she proposes that during her survey she will attempt to identify each ‘pin-prick’ of light to assess ratio of adult females to larvae. She has also ‘trained’ a few other volunteers and I am hoping that we can encourage others to cover transects around most of the hill.

Given that female Glow-worms are flightless and therefore local populations cannot move rapidly, I wondered whether the presence of the insect might indicate that the habitat was largely unspoiled – and from what Sue has found this might well be so and perhaps there may be a case for using presence/absence (on suitable soils) as a simple method of carrying out an initial survey over a wide area.

I have been involved with the nursery at Pershore College over plans to propagate new plants from older elm trees which have apparently resisted Dutch Elm Disease for many years. There is little time available to either party but the college has already collected material from an English Elm near Stratford and I obtained material from a Small-leaved Elm near Kemerton. The plan is to produce nursery-grown graft material from the new young trees, to increase stock and then to work with other organisations to get landowners to plant elms back in the areas from where they were lost. It is a rather lofty ambition but one I believe we can have some success with. We have one of these young trees at the greenhouse and I’m hoping that we can find somewhere to plant it at Kemerton. The estate has already planted a young Huntingdon Elm (grown in a similar way) in the new park.

Meetings and Visits

The nearby village of Beckford was given the chance to buy a former sands and gravels quarry as a nature reserve. The owners were the company who also quarried Kemerton Lake area. KCT was asked to help and I have attended a number of meetings, including one public discussion where I was able to assess the amount of local support. Since then the meetings have been at a committee level and I have been advising on funding applications and proposed management. The village has

been very successful in raising funding and the sale is going through. The new trust is very grateful to KCT for our support and advice and I have been asked stay involved in an advisory role as the project develops.

Adrian and I recently attended the official opening of the new headquarters of the Biological Records Centre near Worcester. We/KCT have been closely associated with the centre for some 25 years and many of the wildlife recorders present have visited Kemerton. As you know, all of our data is stored on Recorder database and is later passed to the centre.

Acknowledgements

Running the day-to-day activities of KCT is a considerable task made more difficult by the lack of resources – and the situation worsened when I became ill. The help given by volunteers who came forward has been very valuable. Olivia Chance and other members of KOW continued to manage Daffurns Orchard – even strimming and clearing the grass when the Trust mower was found to be out of action! Alan Marsh and Andy Hull made regular trips to the lake and updated me on the situation, carrying out essential repairs and management work whenever they could, Rob Prudden made extra visits to count birds at the lake and to check the site, reporting back regularly.

Finally, I would like to thank Pamela for her efforts in keeping the work of KCT ticking over while I have been out of action. In addition to nursing me and running the home and garden she has looked after the greenhouse and spent time in the office responding to telephone calls, emails and the post - and liaising with volunteers. As a result of her efforts we have retained some sort of order in the office, maintained our contacts beyond the Trust and enabled the volunteers to keep up the high standards that we set ourselves at the Lake Reserve.