

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 8 March 2023

Period - 3 February – 2 March 2023

On 6 February the MCG, together with Peter Bowyer +2 from Natural England and Nicky Hunter (Newt Surveyor/Ecologist) inspected the pond area in order to consider work to re-scape several of the ponds. The issue of the strength and stability of the main entrance bridge was looked at and agreed by all that it was unsafe for any large mechanical digger machinery to use. Any vehicular access to the Marlot would have to be via the lower NE field and up the main pathway. However, on further inspection and a walkthrough to the middle ponds it was found that the main pond, being the only access through to the other ponds, was too deep and the banks too steep to safely get the digger safely across. There was no other viable access to the central and back ponds and therefore it was agreed that mechanical digger clearing of the ponds was not currently achievable. The conclusion by all was that unless a further access crossing point from the main roadway to the centre and back ponds is constructed that further pond clearing will have to be carried out by hand only. This is an issue which will need further consideration at a later date.

After the extensive flooding of the pond area reconstruction work was required on the willow hedge around the viewing area. The side supports had collapsed and willow brash had spilled out onto the pathway. New hedge posts from woodland willow were cut and staked around the hedge and the willow brash re-stacked. A temporary covering of cut willow was laid across the muddy pathway at the steps to the woodland area. It is intended to strengthen the pond paths with a further trellis of cut willow and then covered by wood chippings – but this needs to be done when the ground has had time to dry out. We also cleared and dug out reed mace from the edges of several of the ponds in order to open them up for the breeding newts. The reeds were left on the side for a week to enable any wildlife to return to the ponds. The overgrown pathways and pond surrounds were also cut back and all arisings raked up into piles. We were lucky to have an additional workday this month as we received an offer of help from 3 volunteers from Natural England. Their assistance enabled us to quickly remove the cuttings, rake and clear pathways and place all the arisings in our compost heaps. No further work will be conducted in the ponds themselves due to newt breeding, however the pathways will undergo regular cutting for visitor access during the rest of the year.

We are currently focussing work on clearing silt and vegetation from the meadow-side ditch, starting at the James' farm end. This is a thankless and dirty task which will take a considerable amount of time and effort to complete. We are still waiting for some clear and dry weather in order to burn the cut and dug willow from our winter efforts – this will take place as and when.

After receiving Councillor Rawlinson's report on the main bridge, the MCG took the opportunity over a weekend to carry out a further assessment of the bridge/culvert. The MCG response has been submitted in a separate report.

The final review and update of the A5 Marlot information 8 page booklet was conducted by myself and my daughter, Alice. It was passed around the MCG who all agreed that it will provide visitors with an informative and useful guide to the Marlot. It has been passed to the Parish Council separately for approval and subsequent printing considerations.

Graham Turnbull

Marlot Conservation Group

2 March 2023