

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 10 May 2023

Reporting Period 11 April – 3 May 2023

Activity during this reporting period has been mainly restricted to regular site inspections, particularly the pond area where flood water has still not fully receded. The ground remains wet around the bridge area and other pathways are still soft underfoot, however they are starting to dry out as better weather continues.

During the first week of this report, we found evidence of bicycle riding around the woodland and pond area. Numerous deep tyre tracks had caused extensive ruts along the pond pathways and the pathway willow batons that we had laid on the muddiest areas for ground stability had been disrupted and uprooted from their positions. We have carried out repair of the paths where we can. We also found evidence of a “jump ramp” in the woodland which had used batons that had been previously placed on the pathway – this has been dismantled. The bench at the top of the woodland cut had also been moved and toppled over. In order to stop bicycle riding in the Marlot we have made up and placed “Footpath Only, No Bicycle Riding” signs at the main entrance gate, the side path gate and the gate opposite James’ farm. Since the signs have been up, we have seen no further evidence of bicycle riding in the Marlot. I also took the opportunity to place a post on the local Whixall village Facebook sites to inform visitors of the wet conditions in the pond area and also to ask people to respect the site for what it is and not to ride bicycles around the paths. We will continue to monitor the situation each week.

The first newt survey of the year was conducted by Dr Nicky Hunter and her husband over 18/19 April. Due to the unsafe nature of access to several of the ponds only 20 traps were placed in ponds 1, 3 and 4. Four male Smooth Newts, 1 Female Smooth Newt, and 2 male Great Crested Newts were trapped in pond 1; 1 male Great Crested Newt and 1 female Great Crested Newt were trapped in ponds 3 and 4. These low numbers are probably due to the colder nights earlier in the month and it is expected that numbers will increase as the nights become warmer and access to ponds becomes easier for more trap laying. Dr Hunter informed the MCG that she was unable to conduct any further surveys until later in May due to other commitments.

In addition to the regular MCG site inspections, Tim Lamb has planted a hazel tree at the top of the woodland cut and has carried out regular watering to ensure it beds in. The MCG are now looking at the summer work programme, which will mainly entail pathway grass cutting and maintenance in the meadow and pond areas. We intend to chip and shred the willow cuttings from the front meadow and use this to cover the baton base in the pond pathways.

The Marlot A5 booklets have been received by the MCG and they are excellent. I know the individual who paid for the printing wished to remain anonymous but if you are able, please

pass on our thanks as they are a great addition to the Marlot. Two booklet boxes have been donated by Natural England and these will be placed at the main entrance gate access and also at the side path back gate in the next week. Several booklets have been taken for Wem library by the Parish Clerk and we have placed some down at The Mosses NNR HQ. We will look at other sites to place the booklets and will monitor the uptake from each site to see how much interest there has been. They will definitely add value to the visitor's Marlot experience.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
3 May 2023