

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 10 May 2023

Reporting Period 4 May – 4 July 2023

This reported work period has been disrupted by changeable and unpredictable weather, particularly in early May, which curtailed any useful work being done in and around the pond area due to flooding and also stopped us carrying out pathway cutting and maintenance in the meadows. We have also struggled to carry out our regular Tuesday work days due to the numerous personal and family commitments that we all have. This has resulted in a disjointed work programme; carrying out limited work when we can and with whomever is available and willing to carry out smaller tasks.

Over several individual days of work, Alan Lomas did a great job in separating willow branches from the previously cut willow piles and re-distributing them to the “ready to shred” pile in the front meadow and also disposing of the larger willow roots behind the front meadow tree line. The intention will be to shred the willow branches in the autumn and use this to spread around the pond area paths. We have also cut and strimmed the main pathways in the front and back meadow as well as the pathways in the pond area. This has turned out to be a two weekly exercise as the rate of growth seems to have increased due to the combination of sunny weather and rain. We also had a work day in which we carried out a full inventory of WPC equipment and also a full clean and maintenance of our mechanical equipment (brushcutters/chain saws). It was also a good time to re-assess our current risk assessments and also carry out some equipment training for Alan

The amount of growth in the ponds this year has surpassed anything that we have seen in previous years due to the weather conditions in the spring months. Even though we carried out a lot of pond clearing in the winter months the ponds are now very overgrown. The Mare’s Tail growth is particularly dense this year and the Reed Mace appears to be thicker. This has limited the number of newt surveys that have been conducted due to safety issues with laying the traps. Due to family commitments, Dr Nicky Hunter has only been able to carry out two surveys this year, however the results of those surveys still indicate that Great Crested Newts are in the ponds and are continuing to breed. This winter the MCG will be concentrating on pond clearance as best we can. The ponds are inaccessible to a heavy digger due to the depth of the main pond which is the main access point to all the others. We need to look at other options on how we can best clear the ponds of growth.

On a more pleasing note, in early May Tim Lamb noticed a barn owl in the vicinity of the barn owl box located at the back of the Marlot. This was reported to Bob Harris, who has since reported that the box has/is being occupied by barn owls and chicks have been observed and subsequently ringed. This is great news and has only taken about 3 years to be occupied since it was put up. We are not advertising the fact that the box is occupied.

We have put up two A5 Leaflet boxes (front gate and side gate) and the Marlot leaflets appear to be a success as we have to fill up the boxes on a weekly basis. We had an arranged visit to the Marlot by the Market Drayton branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust. This was to be an accompanied guided tour by myself, however due to a family emergency I could not attend and the other volunteers were unable to take part. However, the Chair of the branch reported that his members had an excellent time at the Marlot and were impressed with the numerous wildflowers and particularly the variety of butterflies and damselflies. He said the leaflet was a great addition and gave them a better understanding of the Marlot as a whole – they will arrange another visit later on in the year. I have also posted an article about the Marlot on the local village Facebook pages, which received a favourable, if somewhat muted response.

The next work period will concentrate on path clearing, creeping willow enclosure and Queen's Jubilee Hedge weeding – again weather and volunteer availability dependant.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
4 July 2023