

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 11 May 2022

Period 7 April -3 May 2022

During this period the MCG has concentrated on the front and back meadows. Whilst the cow grazing had kept some areas of grass down there was a need to carry out a further grass and hay cut using brush-cutters. Much of the front meadow, and part of the back meadow, was also covered in early growth willow and whilst the MCG has managed to dig out several patches of willow by hand it was decided to cut the remaining patches down to the ground. These areas will re-grow and the intention will be to dig as much out by hand again later in the year or early next year. The cutting and subsequent raking of the grass, willow and hay was carried out over a 5 week period (working each Tuesday – with one work day cancelled due to rain). This work produced a considerable amount of arisings and due to a period of dry and sunny weather it was decided too dangerous to burn on site. With Councillor Alan Rawlinson's permission, we were able to deposit the grass and willow arisings (several trailer loads) in an area of his property where we had previously deposited pond debris. This was a great help and we thank him; it has enabled us to clear the meadows of all debris. Additional work during this period also included repairing the main meadow entrance pathway and levelling of the connecting path between the two meadows from the damage caused by the cow grazing.

From a referral from Councillor Ian Mercer based on discussions he had with Natural England regarding nature trail proposals, the MCG met with Mr Stephen Barlow (NE Volunteer and Naturalist Photographer) at the Marlot to discuss his involvement in assisting with content and photographs for possible future interpretation boards and a Marlot guide. He is already working with Shropshire Wildlife Trust to develop additional trails and information for them in the area and he was keen to incorporate the Marlot in his work. The Marlot, and its paths, will be added to any maps and website content that are produced. He agreed to help in any way he can regarding information leaflets and board content (which will be discussed at the Steering Group meeting)

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (Anna Martin SWT Events Officer), with Natural England assistance, took the opportunity to arrange and conduct a newt survey public event at the Marlot. The event was led by Mr Phil Playforth (SWT and registered newt handler) and was attended by 7 members of the public (3 adults and 4 children). MCG members assisted Mr Playforth in setting the newt traps the day before the event and also attended on the day to observe how the event was conducted and to assist as required. A small, but enjoyable event showing the future possibilities for other organisations to utilise the Marlot for their own arranged events on site, which we need to encourage. Mr Playforth and the MCG also laid several roofing felt sheets around the pond areas as refugia for newts and other

amphibians/wildlife. These will be periodically checked by the MCG and results reported back to Mr Playforth at SWT.

MCG members also attended a meeting with members of Whixall Parish Council to discuss future plans and arrangements for the Marlot's administrative and physical management. A lively meeting which highlighted many different issues and requirements. From this meeting came the establishment of a steering group made up of 2 WPC members and 2 MCG members who are tasked to look at priorities and requirements needed to take the Marlot to the next level of Local Nature Reserve development. The first meeting will be on Monday 16th May (at the Bull and Dog pub!).

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
4 May 2022