

Marlot Activity Report (8 March – 6 April 2022)

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG) Work report to Whixall Parish Council

Much of the work during this period has been repairing the damage to the footpaths around the Marlot caused by a combination of the grazing cows' footfall and bad weather. In the pond area the group decided to prepare and construct a base trellis of wood across the extremely muddy areas and cover these with wood chippings from brash and cut willow from the Marlot. In tandem with this work, the group also filled in the numerous deep cow footprints around the ponds – this was particularly important as there was concern that breeding newts from the ponds would be trapped in these holes and would be unable to get out. Whilst a lot of work has been done around the pond area in repairing the paths there is still work to be done and this will be determined by weather conditions and the drying out of the muddy areas when it can be raked and levelled to ensure safe paths.

Work has also continued in the front meadow area with respect to repairing the pathway. Much of this has been the laborious and time consuming task of filling in individual cow footprint holes and levelling the earth with hand tools. Around the creeping willow and picnic table area the ground is particularly wet and muddy and the group has cut dry grass from other areas of the meadow and laid it over the muddy areas in an attempt to bind with the mud. It is hoped that with good weather that these muddy areas will dry out enough for more levelling and repair to be done more effectively. We have also prepared the area where we have previously cleared willow and will be sowing the last of the wild meadow flower seeds that were purchased last year in an attempt to further encourage wild flower coverage in the front meadow area.

On Sunday 20th March we had the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Hedge planting event for the community of Whixall. The event was extensively advertised on both Whixall Community Facebook pages, as well as Wem and Whitchurch Facebook Groups. An email with associated poster was sent to Whixall Primary School Headteacher asking for the event to be publicised to the school children and their parents (this request was not even acknowledged by the Headteacher). Posters were also put up on all the village noticeboards. Unfortunately, and much to the Group's dismay and disappointment not one local Whixall villager turned up for the event. The only local Whixall people who took part were the James' family and a local friend who was visiting the farm adjacent to the Marlot – and even their participation was only after the MCG specifically asked them to come and help out. All other participants, 6 in total, were passers-by who were out for a walk on the Moss (these from Manchester and Nantwich) who were cajoled into planting a few saplings. The majority of the 60 saplings were planted by the 4 MCG members and Alice Turnbull, who came to help out on the day. Whixall is extremely lucky to have its own Local Nature Reserve on its doorstep, however it would be good if it was recognised and supported by local people who are always saying how close and caring a community they are!

The first newt survey of the season was conducted, under the auspices of Nicky Hunter, on 25/26 March. In total 63 traps were laid on the Friday evening in all the 6 ponds and these were then inspected on the Saturday morning. More newts were caught than last March, however more traps were used and the weather has been milder and it is thought that this has encouraged the newts to breed earlier. In total there was 11 Male Great Crested Newts; 17 Female Great Crested Newts (many heavy with eggs); 3 Male Smooth Newts; 8 Female Smooth Newts and numerous other insects including Greater and Lesser diving beetles, water boatmen and stonefly larvae. A further survey will be conducted by Nicky Hunter in April with the MCG. Natural England, with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, are also considering a public amphibian event at the Marlot at the end of April. This will be dependent on their

own Health and Safety risk assessment and availability of an EPS licensed person to run the event.

The MCG has spent to the limits of its annual working budget, however, should the Parish Council have an underspend on its budget it is requested that consideration be made to provide the MCG with some additional funding. At present we have only one of each of the hand tools that we use, such as rake, pruning saw, spade, fork, leaf rake etc and purchasing a second additional tool will help the MCG to spread work equally and without using our own personal tools. We could also use more health and safety items such as gloves, goggles and hi-vis vests for the team.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
7 April 2022