

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 14 September 2022

Period 6 July- 6 September 2022

The summer months are traditionally a quieter period for work down at the Marlot. In mid-July it was too hot to conduct any work at all and two work days had to be cancelled. In the last week in July and early August it was decided to carry out a full pathway clearance in the pond area and both the back and front meadow. This made walking around much easier for visitors and also allowed us to control access to specific areas around the ponds. The MCG also carried out a full weed of the Queen's Jubilee Hedgerow, which was getting rather overgrown, and also spread wood chippings in the area to suppress further weed growth. The creeping willow patch was also getting a bit overgrown with brambles and a full weed and clearing of overgrowth was carried out in both patches. In the hidden pond area, a large willow tree had partially fallen down and although it caused no obstruction to pathways it was decided to remove it. The tree was fully cut down and logged using chainsaws – processed wood going to MCG members. We also took the opportunity to shred the numerous branches (and a few younger willow saplings) and used the chippings along the pond area to maintain the pathways. Once the tree was removed from the hidden pond a full rake of dead leaves and detritus was conducted – this will assist in ensuring a clean pond when it floods up and hopefully encourage more newts.

On 7 August, at the request of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, I conducted a 2 hour tour of the Marlot for 15 members of the Whitchurch branch. The group thoroughly enjoyed the visit to the Marlot and many noted the change in the environment and acknowledged the hard work of the MCG in making it a more pleasant experience to walk around. Stephen Barlow also attended and provide his experience and knowledge of the flora and fauna which added to the visit. Further visits will be arranged by the Secretary of the branch and myself.

It was good to see that the bid for funding for a bench and picnic table made to Connexus was successful. The Parish Clerk has informed me that she will liaise with Connexus regarding the funding, after which we can look at the logistics of purchase. I have also sent a “wish list” email of infrastructure requirements, as agreed at the PC/MCG Marlot meeting (16 May), to Councillor Alan Rawlinson (amended now to omit the bench and picnic table) and look forward to any update on getting the equipment. I have also produced a draft A5 information leaflet (8 pages) about the Marlot, which was seen and commented on by the MCG. Draft copies were provided to the lead organisers of the Whitchurch Shropshire Wildlife Trust branch during their recent tour and favourable comments were made – all agreeing that it would enhance the visitor experience. I have passed the draft version to Councillor Bob Harris and work is in hand to develop a more professional looking leaflet but using the same content and style, through his Graphic Designer contact. If this A5 leaflet is realised then it will be the main means of communication and information about the Marlot to various environmental, educational and wildlife groups, as well as on-site visitors.

Finally, it has been decided by the MCG that we will not use the cows for conservation grazing this year. After the considerable damage that they did last year and the laborious, time consuming and difficult work to resurface and repair the pathways it was considered counterproductive and unnecessary to have cows on every year. The meadow pastures will be cleared by hand using brush-cutters in the autumn and pre-spring periods. I have informed the Parish Clerk and Paul Martin of this fact. The MCG will assess the requirement this time next year – Paul Martin is happy that he remains our go-to Farmer and any further requirement will be under a new Grazing agreement as and when.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group

5 September2022