

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council for its meeting on 12 January 2022

Since the last report to Council was prepared, Alan Lomas has joined the MCG and is giving valuable assistance as and when work commitments allow.

Storm Arwen also arrived on Friday 26th November, causing severe damage overnight. Trees and outbuildings were left in a dangerous condition, which necessitated closing the site to the public on the following morning for safety reasons.

The damaged buildings, part of which were hung up in a tree, were the property of Natural England. We were most fortunate that two of their senior staff were able to attend on Tuesday 30th to clear all the debris, assisted by Martin Spenser and Graham Turnbull. Graham took some photographs and video footage during the operation to release the barn from its new home in the tree. Considering that Natural England had many other storm damage incidents to deal with, their ready assistance to us was much appreciated.

We were able to reopen the site to the public on 7th December, after our team felled a large *Alder* and carried out sufficient logging and processing to restore the safety of the area. Having put some details of the events on social media, it took no time at all for “locals” to demand the timber, but we had planned to use most of it for rustic features around the site. However, a substantial amount of timber was handed over.

Prior to the storm, we had carried out some willow coppicing, using the arisings to complete the compost clamps mentioned in our last report.

We have almost finished the process of clearing vegetation from the ponds. The task involves entering the ponds in waders, so as to reach the substantial root systems of the *reedmace*, commonly called bulrushes.

On 10th December, our little wildlife haven officially became a Local Nature Reserve and printed notices were put up on the entrance gates to publicise the fact. During our lunch break on that day, John Piper and Alan spotted a *kingfisher* at the pond area; a flash of blue, then it was gone.

Sometime around that date, the site was visited by an ecologist who is a nationally recognised expert on *caddis flies*. He did not make any contact with members of the team, but he did report back to Natural England staff, having identified rare snails on site and some insect species. He also passed favourable comment about the way that the site was being managed. If anything, this does highlight our dilemma in trying to nurture different species because, for instance, the shallow scrapes favoured by snails are not suitable for breeding newts.

The storm damage was immediately followed by intensive wet weather, which has saturated the site and scuppered the plan to introduce cattle to the meadow areas for the time being. This will be kept under review, but we are

likely to be faced with a lot of clearance work that the cattle might otherwise have achieved.

Our application to Shropshire Council for some saplings to be provided under its Free Trees scheme has been approved. The trees will be planted as a hedgerow, and the ground is being prepared in readiness for planting in March.

Bird nest boxes have been restored and will be re-installed in due course, albeit in a higher position in an attempt to prevent the interference which has occurred in the past.