

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 24 January 2024

Reporting Period 5 Nov 2023 – 10 January 2024

Volunteer work during this reporting period has been adversely affected by seasonal bad weather and in particular the constant rain experienced. Brush cutting and grass raking of the front and back meadows was completed over several work sessions, but it has been impossible to burn the grass cuttings, as we would normally do, as it is just too wet. It was decided to remove the cuttings and place them in the wooded area between the two meadows in the numerous hollows that exist. This ensures that the cuttings are out of sight and will mulch down in the next few months. There are still patches of grass cuttings in the front and back meadows that require removing and this will be completed as and when volunteer availability and weather permits. Martin Spenser has also removed the electric fence wiring from the main entrance of the Marlot.

The pond area is still an area for concern. During this reporting period the volume of rain has caused further extensive flooding of the pond area with all paths now completely underwater. The whole area resembles one big lake and has extended all the way across to the compost heaps. The water level in the ditch at the pond side of the entrance remains at the top of the bridge and in fact at one time did start to overflow across the entrance. Whilst it can be seen that there is a “flow” of water into the meadow side ditch this is considered mainly due to water forcing itself through the foundations and bank of the bridge and not through the blocked pipe. As has been previously mentioned the integrity of the bridge foundations are in doubt and action is desperately needed to resolve the drain problem which is the cause of the flooding. This is the period when the MCG would be clearing the ponds of overgrown reed mace and attempting to deepen and clear the ponds in readiness for the newt breeding season – however we are unable to do this due to the extensive flooding and blocked drain. This will inevitably result in a reduced count, if any, of newts later on in the year. We are acutely worried about the environmental impact this is having on the pond area as well as the amount of corrective and repair work that will now be needed to bring the paths and surrounds back to a standard where it can be used and enjoyed safely by visitors.

As has been previously requested by the MCG we would like to know the Parish Council’s way forward on the drain and bridge issue. It is now coming up to a year since this was highlighted by the MCG.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
10 January 2024

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 14 February 2024

Reporting Period 10 Jan – 13 Feb 2024

A short report for this period. Due to the conditions in the pond area work has concentrated on the front and back meadows. The MCG has continued to remove the grass cuttings from both meadows and have deposited them inside the tree line that separates the meadows. We have also started to dig up a patch of willow in the front meadow. Last year's removal of the willow by digging out the roots has proved to be a success with little or no re-growth in the area. Although a labour intensive task the results will hopefully compensate for the extra effort. Further brush cutting and raking has continued in the back meadow. Intentions for further work including a full weed of both the creeping willow patch and the Platinum Jubilee hedge.

The MCG would like to thank the Parish Council for their decision and intentions regarding the future work to be carried out at the entrance bridge and culvert made at the last Council meeting. We look forward to hearing further details on an intended work plan and timescale.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
10 February 2024

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 13 March 2024

Reporting Period 13 Feb – 11 Mar 2024

A short report for this period. Work has continued on the front and back meadows in preparation for the spring period. We have carried out further brush-cutting on both meadows and a further closer trim of the grass has also been done to encourage growth of wildflowers in both areas. We have also continued to dig out the willow in the front meadow.

We are now being restricted in our work due to availability of MCG volunteers. We are averaging 2 volunteers a session now due to absences and other commitments. This has been compounded by myself now being out for several months due to having had surgery on my foot. Work will carry on as and when – there is still enough work to be conducted in an around the meadows and woodland. Work in the pond area is in abeyance until the culvert/bridge/flooding issue has been resolved and it is safe to work in this area. We hope that work will start soon so as not to aggravate the problem further.

I have also had to cancel a talk about the Marlot to Ellesmere Shropshire Wildlife Trust members in early April due to my current situation; this has been rearranged for a later date.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
11 March 2024

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 10 April 2024

Reporting Period 11 Mar – Apr 24

The reduction in available volunteers, currently only Martin Spenser and Tim Lamb, has meant a limited amount of work has been carried out during this reporting period. The brush cutting tasks in the front and back meadow have now been completed and the cuttings have either been burned or re-distributed into hollows in the adjoining wooded area between the meadows.

On investigation, it was found that a large collecting pool of water was starting to form from run-off coming into the north east section of the woodland area from the land at Plantation House. There was concern that this water was possibly polluted with horse manure and could make its way down the side ditch into the pond area – adding to further concerns for the wildlife in the ponds. With this in mind Martin and Tim have dug channels away from the ditch to distribute the water into the deeper woodland where it would eventually seep into the ground without any adverse effect.

The pond area is still flooded in many areas and no useful work can be achieved at this moment. However, using Martin's portable pump they have managed to pump some flood water out of the covered pond next to the compost heaps. The water was re-distributed and directed over the pathway and into the light wooded area on the other side. Whilst this may seem a futile task, considering the amount of flood water in the main pond area, it has at least allowed a slight reduction on level in this individual pond and has enabled some of the outlying patches of ground to partially dry out. We are, however, at the beck and call of the weather which is dictating what work can be successfully achieved.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
8 April 2024

From: Whixall Parish Clerk
Sent: 07 May 2024 18:32
To: Alan Rawlinson; Bob Harris; Claire Weedall; David Edgerton; igmercer; Jen Spenser; margarethoward7; Med Evans (med@darwinwealth.co.uk); philiprodenhurstwpc@outlook.com
Subject: FW: Marlot Report?

Dear All

Please see the informal report from Graham re the Marlot.

For information, it's my intention to give the MCG an update on the meeting with Natural England once the Council has received an update tomorrow.

Kind regards

Mandy

From: Graham Turnbull <turnbullgraham7@gmail.com>
Sent: 03 May 2024 19:13
To: Whixall Parish Clerk <Clerk.whixallPC@hotmail.co.uk>
Cc: Tim Lamb <maddogs2911@gmail.com>; Martin Spenser <m.spenser@btinternet.com>; Alan Lomas <lomasalan@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: Marlot Report?

Mandy ,

No formal report this month. We have been restricted on work down at the Marlot due to the unavailability of volunteers. We have only had one work period during the month and that was Tim Lamb who strimmed the main pathways in the meadow area and also around the Jubilee hedgerow.

Dr Nicky Hunter also went down to the ponds to assess conditions for newt surveys. The pond area is still flooded (although receding) and she considered it too slippery and wet to put in traps. She also mentioned that the weather is still too cold at the moment for breeding. She will look again late in May.

If you could pass this information on to the PC at the Marlot agenda item.

The MCG look forward to hearing about the meeting between PC, NE and Land Agent regarding the work / assessment of the drain/bridge situation.

Regards

Graham

Sent from my iPhone

On 3 May 2024, at 16:55, Whixall Parish Clerk <Clerk.whixallPC@hotmail.co.uk> wrote:

Hello Graham

The PC meeting is very early this month – next Wednesday. Is there anything to report?

Are you up and about yet?

Kind regards

Mandy

Amanda Roberts

Clerk: Whixall Parish Council

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 10 July 2024

Reporting Period 3 May – 8 July 24

Once again, the reduction in available volunteers, currently only Martin Spenser and Tim Lamb, has meant a limited amount of work has been carried out during this reporting period. Work has been restricted to strimming the pathways in the meadows and along the main pathway. Brush-cutting of the back meadow has also been conducted to reduce the growth of bracken.

At the end of May, Nicki and Tim Hunter took the opportunity to conduct a small newt survey. The pond area was still very wet and the mare's tails and mace reeds had encroached in all the ponds making it difficult to survey and place the traps in position. Twenty traps were placed around the ponds and disappointingly only 4 male Great Crested Newts were found. There were no signs of developing efts at all and this is most likely due to their sensitivity to any pollution on site. It was noted by Nicki that the standing water has not drained away and smells very foul. A final survey was carried out on 30 June and the results have been disappointing. The huge growth of mare's tails and the hot weather experienced over the month has now started to dry out the ponds which are now silty and shallow – making trapping difficult. Only one Great Crested Newt was caught and no smooth newts. It is the end of the breeding season for the adults but it was expected that some juvenile newts (efts) should have been found as in previous years but this was not the case. Hopefully any correctional work to the drain issue will provide better results next year.

Graham Turnbull

Marlot Conservation Group

8 July 2024

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 11 Sep 24

Reporting Period 8 July- 6 September

Summer work down at the Marlot has mainly concentrated on cutting and strimming the meadow and main pathways. These sessions have had to work around the varying weather conditions that we have experienced and also the availability of personnel to conduct the work. In addition to clearing the pathways we have also completed a full weed of the terrace seating at the top of the pond area and also a full weed of the creeping willow patch. We also took time in clearing and cutting back the many overhanging branches along the main pathway and along the pond paths. The MCG has also had one session of equipment and machinery maintenance. This involved a full clean and service of equipment to ensure maximum effectiveness and running of the brush cutters and other tools.

The lack of work in the pond area due to the winter flooding has meant that the reed growth has now completely overtaken the ponds and the ponds are hardly discernible. It is because of this heavy overgrowth that no further newt surveys were conducted in June or July. There will be much work to be done in the pond area over the winter months, however this is dependent on the work to be conducted on the pipe and culvert at the main entrance and its effectiveness over the winter period.

Worryingly, we have also had to cordon off part of the main entrance around the edges of the ditch railings. This was due to the ground sinking and collapsing along the edges of the bridge and several holes appearing close to the railings. The central part of the entrance is still considered safe for walking on, however there is a worry that the subsidence will start to impact further onto the whole of the bridge and thus be too unsafe for use and the main entrance will have to be closed off. It is therefore vitally important that the work programmed to repair the bridge and culvert area be carried out as soon as possible. It is requested that we be informed of the proposed work plan and timescale that the Parish Council has negotiated with Natural England to carry out the work, and would appreciate being “kept in the loop” with any plans and progress.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
6 Sep 2024

Marlot Conservation Group (MCG)

Work report to Whixall Parish Council meeting 13 Nov 24

Reporting Period 6 September – 11 November 2024

Very little work has been carried out during this reporting period due to weather conditions and lack of availability of volunteers. We did however manage to carry out a cut of all the meadow and main pathways during this period which should see us through the winter months. On Monday 28 October, Natural England workers commenced the work on the Marlot culvert; Dr Nicki Hunter had been to Marlot to assess for the presence of newts and gave the okay to commence the digging out of the old foundations and pipe. Work continued on the following day where the new pipe was laid and new foundations constructed. New earth was brought in to fully cover the pipe and form the new bridge. I took the opportunity to witness the excellent work being carried out and talk with the Natural England workers (Paul and Andrew) – also taking photographs for the Marlot archive. There still remains work to be done in constructing the new fences/barriers at both edges of the culvert and Natural England have stated that they will do this on a volunteer day in the coming weeks. With no side fences/barriers up yet it has been decided to keep the main gate closed to public access due to health and safety concerns. The gate is locked and will be re-opened once the barriers have been constructed.

Future work by MCG volunteers will be to grass seed the top of the bridge to fully bind in the ground surface. We will also start to clear any obstructions and vegetation in both sides of the ditch to avoid any build-up of debris that may stop the flow of run-off water. It is also our intention to request for a Natural England volunteer day to assist in removal of reeds in the pond area. This is a mammoth task and will take some considerable time to get the ponds back to their glorious self.

A new “Welcome to the Marlot LNR” wood log sign has been made and will be installed at the entrance to the main gate once all work has been completed.

Graham Turnbull
Marlot Conservation Group
11 Nov 24