

Whixall Marlot Ecological Management Plan



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1. Introduction

Marl Allotment (Marlot) is a 2.45 ha area of common land on the south side of Whixall Moss. The soil is peat and it is hydrologically part of the Fenns, Whixall and Bettisfield Moss complex. The Marlot contains a mosaic of habitats, the most valuable of which are:-

1. Acidic wet grassland with Purple Moor-grass and Devil's-bit Scabious.
2. Wet woodland with Betula spp. and Sphagnum mosses.
3. Lowland raised mire with Sphagnum mosses.
4. Oligotrophic (low nutrient) standing water

Shropshire Council's LEADER funded 'Your Natural Heritage' project undertook a considerable amount of habitat management work at the Marlot in 2012. This aimed to help restore the site, enhancing its biodiversity and encouraging community use. A series of ecological surveys were also undertaken in 2012, providing a baseline for future monitoring. This included a botanical survey by Lockton (2012), who made the following management recommendations.

- ❖ Cut back trees and scrub.
- ❖ Fence the site and have it grazed by cattle for at least part of the year.
- ❖ Dig out scrapes to ensure that there is open water.

This plan lays out an annual management schedule to ensure that the biodiversity and community value of the site is maintained and enhanced where possible.

2. Legislation

2.1 Habitat and landscape designations

The ditch along the western boundary of the Marlot falls within the Fen's, Whixall, Bettisfield, Wem & Cadney Mosses SAC, SSSI and RAMSAR site. Natural England were consulted during the preparation of this management plan to ensure there is not detrimental impact on the designated site. Natural England should be consulted if there are any major changes in management or if work is required that may affect the designated site.

The Marlot is registered Common Land and subject to protection under the Commons Act 2006. The erection of temporary electric fencing for conservation grazing is only exempt from section 38 consent if less than 10% of the total area of the registered Common Land unit is enclosed. Adhering to the exemption criteria would make grazing the Marlot

infeasible. Section 38 consent is being sought from the Secretary of State. Consent for grazing is also required from Natural England due to the adjacent designated site.

2.2 Protected species

The Marlot contains a number of protected species (Table 1). This plan has been prepared with protected species in mind. Following the plan and using the protected species method statements (appendix 1) should prevent infringements of wildlife legislation.

Table 1: Protected species recorded at or near the Marlot

Species	Protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)	Protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010
Barn Owl (<i>Tyto alba</i>)	Yes*	No
Other bird species	Yes	No
Eurasian otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Yes	Yes
Great crested newt (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>)	Yes	Yes
Water vole (<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>)	Yes	No

*There are special provisions for Barn owl compared to other bird species, as it is listed as a Schedule 1 species.

Table 2: Protection afforded to species listed in table 1 under existing wildlife legislation

Legislation	Offences
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Intentional killing, injuring or taking. ➤ Possession or control of any live or dead animal, or any part of, or anything derived therefrom. ➤ Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure of place used for shelter or protection. ➤ Sell, possess, or transport for sale, any individual live or dead, or anything derived therefrom. ➤ Take, damage or destroy a nest that is in use or being built. ➤ Take or destroy any egg. ➤ Disturb and wild bird included in Schedule 1 (Barn owl) whilst it is building a nest, on or near a nest containing eggs or young. ➤ Disturb dependent young of a Schedule 1 bird.

Legislation	Offences
Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deliberately kill, injure, take <u>or disturb.</u> ➤ Deliberately damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place. ➤ Deliberately take or destroy eggs ➤ Sell, possess, or transport for sale, any individual live or dead, or anything derived therefrom.

Barn Owl

Nesting Barn owls have been recorded near the Marlot and an owl nest box was installed at the site in 2012. It is not known whether the box is currently being used by Barn owls. General activity (e.g. walking underneath the box) should not cause detrimental disturbance. The box must only be checked by a licenced surveyor. The Shropshire Barn Owl group have been notified of the box's location and their contact details can be found on page 16.

Licensing: A Natural England licence is required to check, move or otherwise disturb a Barn Owl nest

Birds (generic)

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the European Birds Directive. Tree work, scrub clearance and hedge cutting should not take place during the main breeding season for birds (March to August). Emergency clearance work, necessary for health and safety purposes, may take place during the bird breeding season following a thorough check for nests. Contact details for the Shropshire Ornithological Society can be found on page 16.

Eurasian otter

The Eurasian otter is most likely to visit pools at the Marlot between January and May, as breeding amphibians, particularly frogs and toads, are an important component of their diet. Access to the pools from the canal should not be obstructed. As marginal vegetation establishes around the pools it is possible that otters will use tall vegetation as a resting site. Resting sites must not be damaged, destroyed, obstructed or disturbed. General use of the Marlot should not affect otters, but if resting sites are identified then users and dogs should be kept away from this area. Contact details for the Shropshire Mammal Group can be found on page 16.

Licensing: A Natural England licence is required to check or disturb an otter resting site. This includes deploying remote cameras.

Great Crested Newt

Great Crested newts require aquatic and terrestrial habitat and can live in a range of natural, semi-natural and artificially created habitats. They require water bodies to reproduce and adults may migrate to breeding ponds from late January onwards. Adults and juveniles move to terrestrial habitat from late summer. This typically includes grassland, scrub, woodland, hedgerows and wasteground. Great Crested newts (GCN) have been recorded in at least two pools at the Marlot. Therefore, all suitable aquatic and terrestrial habitats at the Marlot could be occupied. There must be no damage, destruction or obstruction of GCN habitat and the newts must not be disturbed whilst occupying places of shelter or rest.

Work that affects open water (e.g. dredging) **must not** be undertaken between late January and the end of September. If necessary, work can be undertaken on the pools between Oct and early January, but the work must adhere to a method statement to ensure that no harm is caused to Great crested newts or their habitat. During autumn and winter GCN are likely to inhabit the log habitat piles near to open water, although they could be found anywhere that provides shelter and sufficient food (invertebrates). Contact details for the Shropshire Amphibian and Reptile Group can be found on page 16.

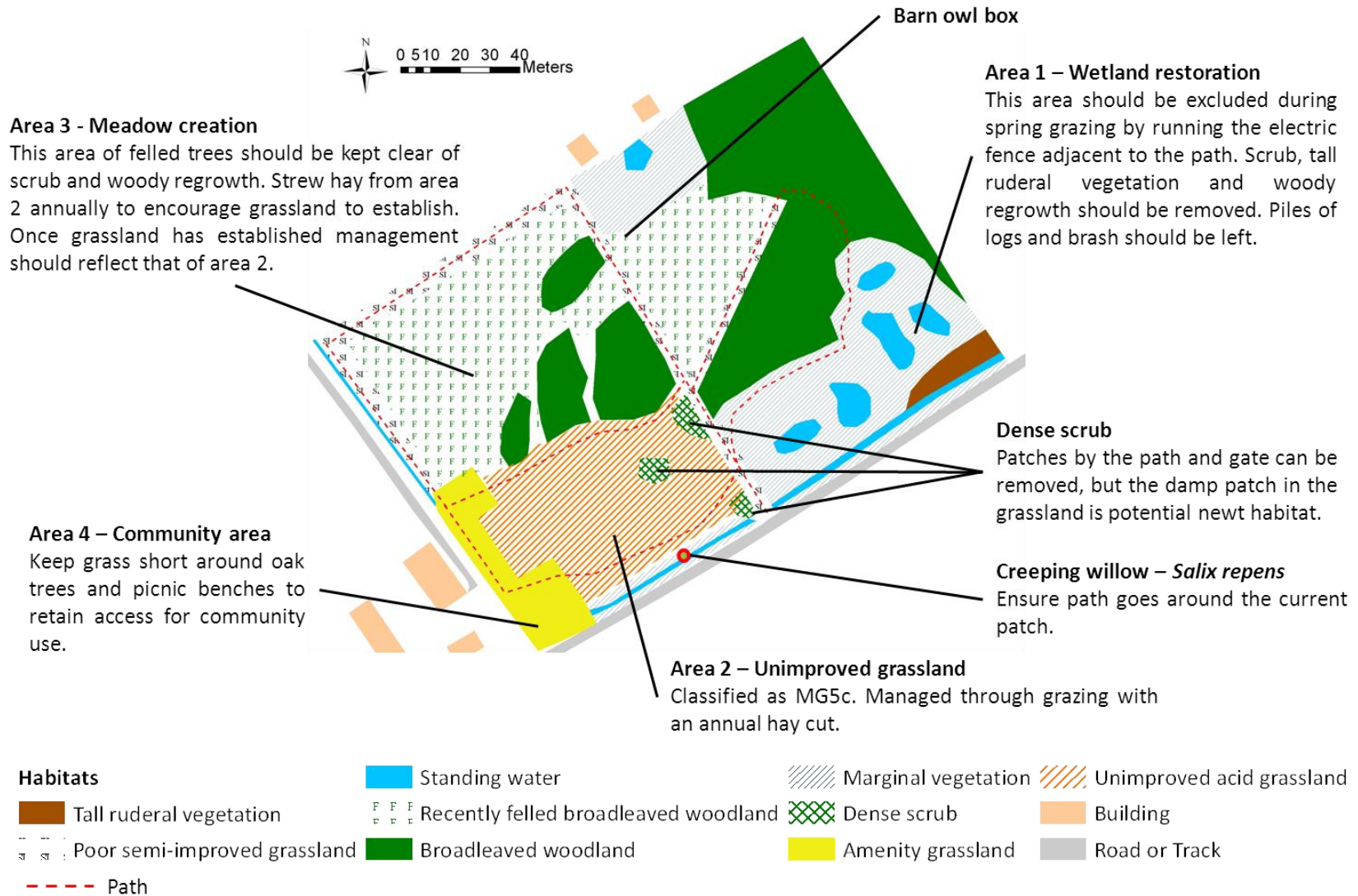
Licensing: A Natural England licence is required to trap, handle or disturb Great Crested newts.

Water vole

Water voles have been recorded on the Llangollen canal adjacent to the Marlot. It is thought that they may also be found in the ditches of the Marlot, although a survey undertaken in 2012 found no evidence of this. All areas within 10 m of the ditches and pools should be considered as potential Water vole habitat and no work should be undertaken in these areas between March and September. Water voles do not hibernate, but they do become less active in autumn and winter. Work to the ditches, pools and marginal vegetation can be undertaken between October and February (see section 4), but it must follow a method statement to ensure that no harm is caused to Water voles or their habitat. Contact details for the Shropshire Mammal Group can be found on page 16.

Licensing: A Natural England licence is required to trap or handle Water voles.

3. Whixall Marlot site management plan



4. Management actions at the Whixall Marlot: Appropriate timings and associated protected species risk.

Management Action	Protected species risk	Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q1		
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Dredge/clear ditch channel	Water vole, Great Crested newt, Otter															
Cut vegetation on ditch banks	Water vole, Great Crested newt, Otter															
Cut woody regrowth and herbaceous scrub	Nesting birds															
Spring grazing	Great Crested newt															
Autumn grazing	Great Crested newt															
Full hay cut of grassland	Great Crested newt															
Cut paths into the grassland	Great Crested newt															
Clear scrub vegetation from paths	Great Crested newt															
Tree/scrub clearance	Nesting birds															
Clear vegetation from open water	Great Crested newt															
Dig a new pool	Great Crested newt															

5. Annual management schedule

Section 4 lists the appropriate timings for actions that may be required during the long-term management of the Marlot. Not all of these will be required on an annual basis. Below is an annual plan, actions only need to be undertaken once per year within the appropriate window.

Month	Annual tasks to complete	Non-annual tasks to check
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clear willow & birch regrowth from grassland and around ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut ditch marginal vegetation. ➤ Tree work/scrub clearance
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clear willow & birch regrowth from grassland and around ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut ditch marginal vegetation. ➤ Tree work/scrub clearance
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut paths/amenity areas into grassland. 	
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut paths/amenity areas into grassland. ➤ Spring grazing (maximum 3-4 weeks). 	
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut paths/amenity areas into grassland. ➤ Spring grazing (maximum 3-4 weeks). 	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut paths/amenity areas in grassland. 	
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cut paths/amenity areas in grassland. 	
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Full hay cut of grassland in late August. 	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Autumn grazing maximum 3-4 weeks). 	
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Autumn grazing maximum 3-4 weeks). ➤ Clear scrub from paths. ➤ Clear willow & birch regrowth from grassland and around ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dredge/clear ditch channel s. ➤ Cut ditch marginal vegetation. ➤ Tree work/scrub clearance. ➤ Clear vegetation from open water.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clear scrub vegetation from paths. ➤ Clear willow & birch regrowth from grassland and around ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dredge/clear ditch channel s. ➤ Cut ditch marginal vegetation. ➤ Tree work/scrub clearance. ➤ Clear vegetation from open water.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clear scrub vegetation from paths. ➤ Clear willow & birch regrowth from grassland and around ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dredge/clear ditch channel s. ➤ Cut ditch marginal vegetation. ➤ Tree work/scrub clearance. ➤ Clear vegetation from open water.

6. Management action guidance

Dredge/clear ditch channel

Objective: Maintain permanent open water within the channel and retain drainage function for neighbouring properties. Water depth in the channel should be at least 25 cm, but not greater than 1 m.

Protected species method statements: Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), Great Crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*).

If you encounter any protected species all work should stop immediately and Natural England's licensing department should be contacted for advice.

Timing: Clearance should only take place between October and December. Undertaking work outside of this period risks committing a wildlife crime and will require a licence from Natural England, which is unlikely to be granted due to the potential impact on protected species.

- Ditch dredging may be necessary every 3-5 years, a weed cut may be necessary every 1-2 years.

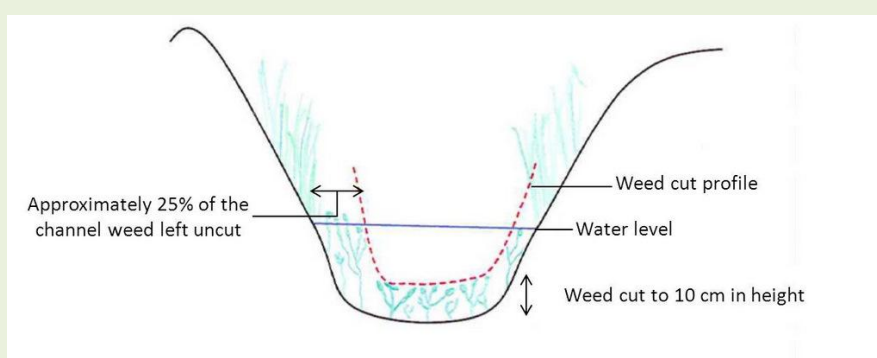
How much? Do not dredge/clear more than one third of the ditch network in a single year.

Dredging/distillation: Use the Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership's photographic '*Ditch and habitat management for Water voles*' document as a guide. The guidelines below **must** be followed

- Clearance must not cut into the bank edge or drag material up the banks.
- A digger can be used, but must not be operated within 3 m of any water body. Hand held tools can be used within 3 m of the water's edge.
- Careful working to avoid slumping of marginal vegetation into the channel.
- Large woody material (logs, brash piles) sitting on the bank slope or bank top should not be removed or disturbed. Small woody material (individual branches/twigs) can be removed by hand.

Weed cutting:

- Cut mid-channel vegetation to a height of around 10 cm from the ditch bed.
- Leave a strip of mid channel vegetation along one edge of the ditch.



Spoil deposition: Spoil removed from the channel must not be deposited on the bank slope. It should be lifted clear of the bank top and marginal vegetation, unless the removed material is mainly vegetation when it should be left on the bank top for 1 day before being removed. Ideally the removed material should be deposited away from the Marlot on arable land. If it must be deposited at the Marlot then it should be put in the wooded areas. It must not be deposited on wetland vegetation, grassland, or within 5 m of the ditches and pools. Landowner permission must be granted wherever the removed material is deposited.

Cutting vegetation on ditch banks

Objective: Enhance botanical diversity by preventing scrub and vigorous herbaceous plants (e.g. nettles) dominating the bank-side vegetation. Reduce flood risk and maintain open water.

Protected species method statements: Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), Great Crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*).

Note: Water voles do not hibernate, but are less active above the ground during autumn and winter. Care should be taken not to harm any Water voles or damage potential Water voles burrows.

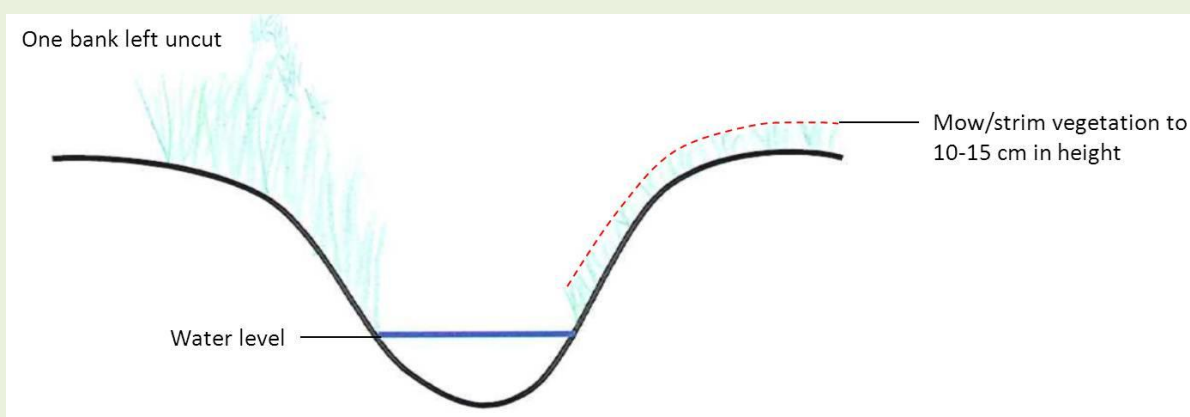
If you encounter any protected species all work should stop immediately and Natural England's licensing department should be contacted for advice.

Timing: Vegetation along the ditch banks can be cleared between October and February, but the optimum time would be autumn. Undertaking this work at other times of the year risks committing a wildlife crime.

How much? Only one bank should be cut each year, alternating between banks.

Cutting method:

- The vegetation can be cut using a mower or brush cutter (blades set to 10-15 cm).
- Ideally only one bank should be cut per year. If it is necessary to cut both banks, a 50 cm uncut margin should be left next to the water's edge on both sides.
- If possible, cut material should be removed from the bank edge and deposited on a compost heap or log habitat pile.



Spring and Autumn Grazing

Objective: Enhance botanical diversity of the grassland and wetland vegetation and reduce scrub re-growth

Protected species method statements: Great Crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

If you encounter any protected species all work should stop immediately and Natural England's licensing department should be contacted for advice.

Timing:

- **Spring:** 3-4 weeks between April and May.
- **Autumn:** 3-4 weeks between September and October.

A suitable grazer agreement should be in place and permission is required from Natural England, due to the close proximity of the designated Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest. Temporary electric fencing requires Section 38 permission due to the Registered Common Land status of the Marlot.

Cattle should be used to graze the Marlot, as they graze in a manner which is more beneficial to botanical diversity than sheep. The ideal number of cattle to be turned out onto the Marlot during each grazing period is 3-5.

Spring grazing

Area 1 (section 3) to be fenced off to prevent potential impacts on Great Crested newts.

Autumn grazing

The entire site should be grazed.

Full hay cut

Objective: Enhance botanical diversity by reducing nutrient content of grassland, plus increasing the area of grassland through hay strewing in area 3 (section3).

Protected species method statements: Great crested newt

Timing: Annually, Mid-August is ideal but it should not take place before mid-July.

Unimproved grassland in area 2 (section 3) should be cut during a period of dry weather. The cuttings should either be collected or raked off. This is important as it helps to reduce the nutrient content of the grassland, encouraging botanical diversity and discouraging more rigorous plants. The cuttings should be strewn over the grassland creation area (area 3 - section 3) on the same day as the cut.

Cut paths in grassland

Objective: Encourage community use of the Marlot

Protected species method statements: Great crested newt

Timing: Annually March –July, ideally in spring so that access does not become difficult.

The paths indicated in the map in section 3 should be cut using a mower or brush cutter to a width of approximately 1.5m. It is not necessary to remove cuttings from the paths. Care should be taken to not damage the area of Creeping willow *Salix repens* identified in section 3

Clear scrub/vegetation from paths

Objective: Encourage community use of the Marlot

Protected species method statements: Great crested newt, nesting birds

Timing: Annually between October-February

The paths indicated in section 3 should be cleared using a brush cutter or hand tools, leaving a path approximately 1.5 m wide. Less clearance will be required as the paths become established and used by people and livestock.

General tree clearance

Objective: Encourage community use of the Marlot

Protected species method statements: Great crested newt, nesting birds

Timing: Only when required, but should take place between October and February

Work to clear fallen or dangerous trees should take place when required. If a tree is considered to be imminently dangerous then it can be removed at any time of year, as long as there are no nesting birds or protected species using it. Brash and logs can be added to the existing log habitat piles or taken away for wood fuel.

Clear woody re-growth and herbaceous scrub

Objective: Enhance botanical diversity by preventing scrub encroachment on the grassland and marginal vegetation.

Protected species method statements: Nesting birds

Timing: Annually, October to February is optimum as this avoids bird nesting season, but this can be undertaken throughout the year if the nesting bird method statement is strictly adhered to.

- All regrowth should be removed from the unimproved grassland, meadow creation area and wetland restoration area on an annual basis.
- Scrub regrowth in the area for grassland creation (area 3 – section1) should be strimmed on an annual basis and the arising's removed and deposited onto a compost heap. This should take place in August, shortly before the meadow hay is strewn over the creation area. The amount of herbaceous scrub re-growth should reduce as grassland plants colonise.
- Grazing will reduce the amount of re-growth that requires removing.

Dig a new pool or enlarge an existing one

Objective: Enhance biodiversity and strengthen the network of pools

Protected species method statements: Nesting birds, great crested newts, Water vole, Otter

Timing: If required or when an opportunity arises. Only between October and December

- New pools can be created if desired, but this must be undertaken at the correct time of the year.
- Shallow pools are better for wildlife than deep ponds. The pool should have a shallow slope to a maximum depth of 40 cm.
- In the unlikely event that a pond has become silted up (to the extent that it rarely holds water) then it may need re-digging and lining with clay or bentonite matting.
- Material removed to create the pond must not be deposited on existing valuable habitat e.g. marginal vegetation, grassland or on the top of the ditch banks.
- Ponds must not be stocked with fish and ducks should not be encouraged.

7. Key Species to monitor

A list of key plant species to monitor is included in the report of Lockton 2012 (*Ecological management and monitoring plan for Marl Allotment, Whixall Moss*). In addition it is recommended that an annual check for Small Pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies is undertaken on a sunny day in early June. Annual surveys of Great crested newts, Water voles and the Barn owl box would be desirable should a suitably qualified and licenced surveyor be available.

8. Useful contacts

Advice on site management	
Shropshire Council	dan.wrench@shropshire.gov.uk
Natural England	pete.bowyer@naturalengland.org.uk
Protected species advice	
Shropshire Council	nicola.stone@shropshire.gov.uk
Natural England	0300 060 0676
Species specialists	
Shropshire Barn Owl Group	john.lightfoot10@btinternet.com
Shropshire Botanical Society	www.bsbi.org.uk/shropshire.html
Shropshire Invertebrate Group	blunt.sig195@btinternet.com or nipajones@tiscali.co.uk
Shropshire Mammal Group	shropshiremammalgroup@gmail.com
Shropshire Amphibian and Reptile group	ShropshireARG@gmail.com
Shropshire Ornithological Society	www.shropshirebirds.com
Help with undertaking management	
Stoke Heath Young Offenders Institute	Ivan.Carlin@hmps.gsi.gov.uk
Help with community activities	
Meres and Mosses Partnership	luken@ShropshireWildlifeTrust.org.uk
Shropshire Council Community Action Officer	sue.thomas@shropshire.gov.uk
Wildlife crime issues	
PC David Harte	david.harte@westmercia.pnn.police.uk

Appendix 1

Protected Species method statement: Water vole *Arvicola amphibius*

This statement should be kept on site at all times during works.

Legislation

The Water vole and its habitat are given strict protection by British law it is listed under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which affords them protection under section 9. Under this it is an offence to;

- Intentionally kill, injure or take water voles.
- Possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives.
- Intentionally damage or destroy places of shelter, or disturb Water voles occupying places of shelter.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.
- Sell water voles or offer or expose for sale or transport for sale.

Appearance

Water voles are a semi-aquatic rodent. Adult's body length reaches 140-220 mm, with a tail that is 95 – 140 mm. Their fur is usually chestnut brown, but sometimes darker. Water voles have a superficial resemblance to Brown rats (*Rattus rattus*) and are often confused for this species. The key features to distinguish Water voles are; blunt nose, short rounded ears and hair covered tail, which is approximately half the length of the body (Figure 1). Rats have a pointed nose, large ears and a scaly tail. Water vole faeces are cylindrical, 8-12 mm long and 4-5 mm wide. Faeces are often deposited in large numbers at latrine sites.



Figure 1: Water vole feeding (left) and burrow (right)

Habitat and ecology

Water voles usually inhabit slow flowing, well vegetated water bodies, ponds and lakes. Reed beds are thought to provide particularly important refuges for Water vole populations. Water voles are occasionally recorded on larger, faster flowing rivers, which is likely to be due to movement between areas of more suitable habitat. Water voles create extensive burrow systems in the banks of water bodies. These burrows will have a number of entrances, including underwater ones, and can extend inland up to 4 metres from the bank edge. At river and stream sites, activity is thought to mainly occur within this 4 m margin. However, individuals may move between water bodies and distribution in non-linear habitats is more difficult to determine. Due to their burrowing behaviour, Water voles tend to occupy habitats with a sloped bank, with a 45° angle thought to be optimum. Water voles tend to be active during the day more than at night. Water voles do not hibernate during winter, although, they do spend more time underground during cold weather.

Areas of significant risk

- Areas of tall or dense emergent vegetation along or within 10 m of a water body.
- Holes or burrow on or near the bank with a diameter of 4-8 cm.

What to do if you find a Water vole

If you encounter a Water vole or suspected Water vole, potential Water vole burrow or latrine site, stop all work immediately. The site will need to be assessed by an experienced ecologist and Natural England consulted, before work can continue.

The following must be contacted.

Nicola Stone – Shropshire Council Biodiversity Technician 01743 252556

OR

Gareth Parry – Shropshire Council Community Biodiversity Project Officer & County Mammal Recorder 01743 252543

You must also contact

Natural England Telford Office 0300 060 0676

Precautionary methods of working

- Area checked by experienced ecologist prior to work commencing to ensure absence of Water voles.
- The work will not affect the structure or profile of the river bank.
- No heavy machinery will be used along the river bank
- Ensure that no oil, fuel or other chemical substances are allowed to enter the water bodies

Protected Species method statement: Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

This statement should be kept on site at all times during the works.

Legislation

The great crested newt (all life stages) and its habitat are strictly protected by British and European laws. It is a European protected species listed in Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats and Species Directive, implemented in Great Britain via regulation 39 of the Habitat regulations 1994. Great crested newts are also listed under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which affords them protection under section 9. It is an offence to;

- Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill, or intentionally injure great crested newts.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a great crested newt.
- Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of a great crested newt
- Deliberately disturb great crested newts or intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection.
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt, unless acquired lawfully.
- Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale great crested newts or parts of them.

Appearance

Adult Great crested newts reach between 110 and 170 mm in length. Adults can be distinguished from those of the other two native newt species (Smooth and Palmate) by size and colouring; the other two species reach a maximum length of 100 mm. The skin of adult Great crested newts is black or dark brown, with darker spots, and has a granular appearance. There are very fine white spots on the lower flanks and the underside is typically yellow/orange. Adult males have a jagged crest along their back, with a distinctive dip at the rear of the abdomen (Figure 1). Females do not have a crest, but have a yellow-orange stripe running along the bottom edge of their tail (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Adult Great crested newts: Male (left) and female (right)

Habitat

Great Crested newts require aquatic and terrestrial habitat and can live in a range of natural, semi-natural and artificially created habitats. They require water bodies to reproduce and adults may migrate to breeding ponds from late January onwards. Great crested newt aquatic habitat is typically well vegetated medium sized ponds with medium to low pH and low levels of shading. This may include clay pits, marl pits, moats, large ditches, quarry ponds, bog pools, sand dune pools and ox-bow lakes. Adults and juveniles move to terrestrial habitat from late summer. This typically includes grassland, scrub, woodland, hedgerows, 'waste ground' or quarry floors. Any site within 1.3km of breeding ponds, which provides adequate prey and shelter, could be occupied.

Areas of significant risk

- Trees with crevices should be cut above the crevice rather than at the base.
- Trees in standing water should be cut slightly higher to reduce the risk of glyphosate entering the water.
- Any refuge/hibernacula e.g. log piles, rubble, loose soil, hedge bottoms, trees with crevices around roots, dense tussock vegetation.

What to do if you find a Great crested newt

If you uncover a Great crested newt, or a suspected Great crested newt, stop all work at the site. Recover the newt gently and contact one of the following for advice.

An experience and licensed Great crested newt survey ecologist

OR

Nicola Stone – Shropshire Council Biodiversity Technician 01743 252556

You must also contact

Natural England Telford Office 0300 060 0676

Precautionary methods of working

- Scrub clearance by hand using hand tools.
- Clear any potential refugia by hand during the amphibian active season (March – September).
- Refugia should not be disturbed in the hibernation season (Oct – Feb).

Please note that, although they are not European Protected species, smooth newts, common toad and common frog should be allowed to disperse naturally if found

Protected Species method statement: Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*

This statement should be kept on site at all times during the work.

Legislation

The Eurasian otter (hereafter referred to as the otter) and its habitat are given strict protection by British and European laws. It is a European protected species listed in Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats and Species Directive, implemented in Great Britain via regulation 39 of the Habitat regulations 1994. Under this it is an offence to;

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill an otter
- Deliberately disturb an otter in such a way as to be likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of otters or the ability of any significant group of otters to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young
- Damage or destroy an otter holt
- Possess or transport an otter or any part of any otter

Otters are also listed under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which affords them protection under section 9. Under this it is an offence to;

- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any otter whilst it is occupying a holt
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a holt

Appearance

Otters are a semi-aquatic mammal from the Mustelid family. Adults typically measure between 90 and 130 cm. Otters have brown fur, which is often pale underneath, and a slender body with a thick tail and webbed feet (figure 1). Otters have large tactile vibrissae (whiskers) around their mouth. When swimming, often just the head and tail are visible above the waterline. Otters tend to be solitary, but male and female will form loose associations during breeding and cubs accompany females for around 9 months, by which time they are fully grown. Otters leave faecal communication markers called spraints (figure 2), which are often the most obvious sign that they have been active in an area.



Fig 3. Adult Otter (left) and spraint (right).

Habitat

Otters are active on all main rivers in Shropshire. It should be assumed that otters can potentially occupy all wetland habitats. Recent research indicates that they frequently utilise terrestrial habitats, particularly in areas between water bodies. Research has indicated that their distribution is primarily influenced by prey availability, but they also tend to prefer areas with bank-side vegetation and potential resting sites. Above ground resting sites tend to be in dense vegetation, such as tussock grass, scrub or reed beds. Holts can be inside bank-side tree root complexes, natural cavities, burrows under dense vegetation or in man-made features. Otters can breed throughout the year, so holts should be assumed to potentially contain breeding females, until there is evidence to suggest otherwise.

Areas of significant risk

- Areas of tall or dense vegetation near to a water course.
- Any large hole, burrow or crevice near to a water course.

What to do if you find an otter

The chances of encountering an otter are small, as this species is predominantly nocturnal. If you do encounter an otter, or suspected otter holt/resting site, stop all work immediately. If the otter is in the river it is likely to move out of the vicinity of the area relatively quickly. However, if the otter is in a holt or resting site this will need to be assessed by an experienced and licensed ecologist, and Natural England consulted, before work can continue.

In all instances than an otter or potential otter holt/resting site is encountered the following must be contacted.

Nicola Stone – Shropshire Council Biodiversity Technician 01743 252556

OR

Gareth Parry – Shropshire Council Community Biodiversity Project Officer & County Mammal Recorder 01743 252543

You must also contact

Natural England Telford Office 0300 060 0676

Precautionary methods of working

- All work undertaken during daylight hours
- Area checked by experienced and licensed ecologist prior to work commencing.
- Ensure that no oil, fuel or other chemical substances are allowed to enter the water bodies

Protected Species method statement: Nesting Birds

All wild birds are given legal protection whilst nesting and roosting under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).

Where possible, vegetation should be cleared outside of the nesting season, which runs from March-September (inclusive). If it is necessary to work within the nesting season then vegetation should be visually inspected for potentially active bird nests. Active includes; nests containing eggs or chicks or nests on which fledged chicks are still dependent. If an active nest is found all work in that area should be suspended. If vegetation cannot be easily seen to be clear of nesting birds then an experienced ecologist should be contacted to carry out the inspection. Works in this area should be suspended until this has taken place.