

THE LESSER-SPOTTED MARSHAL

By Terri O'Leary (Evil Pumpkin)
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IDENTIFYING

This shy and retiring creature can be found at motor racing circuits around the world. Colouring differs, but the common marshal or Pumpkinus Maxiumus will generally have orange plumage.

There are 2 common variations on this plumage in the UK and Ireland – the Pumpkinus Silverstonius which can be identified by its handsome black plumage with orange stripes; and the Pumpkinus Rescuecrewinus which is generally green.

The Rescuecrewinus is an interesting specimen. This type of marshal usually starts with orange plumage, but when they reach maturity, the plumage changes colour. Strangely, unlike most creatures, the plumage of the marshal seems deliberately designed to attract attention, rather than camouflaging the creature. Naturally, this makes it vulnerable to predators, which may account for the decreasing numbers of this fascinating beast.

HABITAT

The habitats of the marshal are as varied as its plumage. For the purposes of this article, we will concentrate on the Pumpkinus Maxiumus variety. Pumpkinus Maxiumus can be found on grassy banks around race circuits. This creature seems to thrive in cold, damp conditions and is often mistaken for a form of fungus on wet days. Marshals become confused and lethargic when exposed to sunshine and exposed patches of skins can become red and irritable.

BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

The common marshal becomes excited when exposed to a racing vehicle in difficulty. In a response comparable to lemmings jumping off a cliff, they congregate around a stranded vehicle and start performing various interesting rituals. These range from pushing on the car to pulling the little red handles on the front. Marshals that participate in this ritual always bring little red bottles with them. It is believed that these red bottles contain an offering for the big metal god they appear to be worshipping. Many drivers report that they have been rescued by these creatures and returned safely to the circuit. They also state that in many cases, the marshals appear to be almost human. This behaviour can be compared to that of dolphins rescuing stranded mariners and greatly adds to the mystique of these creatures.

Some marshals can also be observed at the scene of a racing incident waving small pieces of coloured material and make a strange whistling noise. At time of writing, speculation remains regarding the purpose of this behaviour. The most popular

theory is that the creature with the material is building the nest and is encouraging other marshal to return to the nest with pieces of the racing vehicle to add to the nest structure.

EATING HABITS

This complex animal appears to be almost omnivorous. Like many woodland creatures, it has become increasing urbanized and can often be spotted munching on the produce of circuit burger vans. There is no set dietary pattern for the lesser-spotted marshal, but it is generally agreed that if you have a marshal living in your gravel trap, you can attract it by leaving out small dishes of coffee and doughnuts. Some conservationists have also reported the lesser-spotted marshals being partial to beer.

CONSERVATION

Sadly, this fascinating creature is slowly dying out in the UK and Ireland. Increased urbanization, modernization and the loss of traditional values have all led to a decline in numbers and if the decline continues, the day may come when these amazing animals are no longer seen on our shores.

This would be a terrible blow both to nature and to motor racing and it is imperative that the remaining marshal populations are well treated and encouraged to reproduce. The gestation period of the average marshal is 9 months, but it takes 16 years for a marshal to reach maturity. In an effort to prevent any further decline in numbers, hunting of these creatures is strictly prohibited. Anyone found attempting to run a marshal over is subject to severe penalties.

CARE AND TREATMENT OF MARSHALS

It is considered good luck within motor sport to have a colony of marshals inhabiting your circuit. If you follow the guidelines laid out below, you may be able to persuade the colony to stay.

It is not true that if you touch a marshal, the other members of the pack will then reject it. However, marshals are shy animals and it is best not to touch them unless invited to do so.

Do not attempt to lift them up. Marshals will struggle and may inadvertently injure you. Remember, they may look cuddly, but they are still wild creatures and should be treated with respect.

Drivers should wave to the marshal colonies on each post on either warm up or warm down laps. Marshals appear to crave interactive and respond positively to friendly gestures by drivers.

Marshals should be fed and rested regularly. Provision of bits of paper with "lunch voucher" written on them provoke a positive response as does the opportunity to sit

down and eat the produce of this bit of paper. Marshals are very social creatures within their own groups and can be observed sitting in clumps, swapping food items, making chattering noises and occasionally grooming each other. Marshals that are regularly denied food and rest become lethargic and unpredictable. Some have been known to snap at anyone approaching them. In extreme cases, the colony will dissipate and never be seen again.

Marshals are greatly attracted to shiny things. Some marshal colonies have a ritual that, to an outsider, might even appear to be a raffle. All the marshals gather in one place. One marshal stands in the centre and choose random pieces of paper from a container. These pieces of paper apparently equate to individual marshals who are then provided with some form of shiny thing in what looks like a prize giving ceremony. Obviously, this is a very human interpretation of which is probably nothing more than an elaborate mating ritual. This being said, circuits and race drivers that leave offerings of shiny things that can be used as part of this ritual have reported that they find their marshals to be happier than circuits that do not.

THE FUTURE

If we start to recognize the danger to these amazing circuit dwelling creatures and start improving their habitat, we may still be able to turn the tide and return to a thriving marshal colony at every circuit.