

ARGL Review of 2021

A look back over 2021

2021 was a quiet year for ARGL due to the ongoing effects of Coronavirus. The biggest disappointment was that the Risley Moss reptile surveys, planned in spring 2020, were not permitted for a second year due to COVID precautions. This prevented 60 reptile tins from being placed out around Risley Moss and the survey visits remained on hold indefinitely. Similarly habitat management work at Risley Moss, started in spring 2020, was not continued this year as had been planned.

Despite these setbacks, 2021 has seen significant success on land owned by The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) at Wymott Prison, near Preston. This Review explains the background to this work and aspirations for the coming year.

Pond Management at Wymott Prison, near Preston

In addition to prison itself, the site at Wymott includes a small farm, pasture and a total of eighteen ponds. Some of these ponds are in good condition and need no management, but others are heavily shaded and of little value to plants, invertebrates or amphibians. Great crested newts are widespread in the area surrounding Wymott and have so far been recorded in one of the eighteen ponds. During a site meeting in October 2020, it was agreed that ARGL would carry out management work on the three most heavily shaded ponds.

The work at Wymott came about following an excellent presentation at the 2019 Herp Workers Meeting by Dave Willis of Hertfordshire ARG. As a probation officer Dave had initiated a pond creation project on land owned by the MoJ. This led to ARG UK being invited to become a partner in the "Pond in Every Prison" project, led by the Ministry of Justice



The work by ARGL volunteers on Pond 11 at HMP Wymott. Before (above) and after (below).



and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). This project aims to improve biodiversity in the 119 prisons in England and Wales and create amphibian and reptile habitat on the Ministry of Justice estate. Another element of the project is a nature connectedness programme in which ARG UK works with prison staff and prisoners to generate interest in the natural world.

ARGL was unable to start work at Wymott in 2020, largely due to Coronavirus, but it was given the go-ahead in September 2021 and the first task took place on November 6th. The objective of the management work was to remove trees, a mixture of willow and alder, from

Your ARGL Committee for 2022

Chair: David Orchard
Database Manager: Lee Brady
Treasurer: Lorna Bousfield
Social Media: Natalie Woollacott and
Celise Taylor



groups.arguk.org/argl

the pond edges.

Tree stumps were left high so that they could be easily found, re-cut and treated with herbicide by the Wymott staff. All brash and timber was stacked to form a long dead hedge which will become a worthwhile habitat feature in itself.

The felling of trees around the pond edges was straightforward. However most leaned into the pond, due to having grown towards the light, which meant that most fell into the water and had to be dragged out by hand. This was not an

easy task as they often became caught up in other trees growing in the water. The efforts of ARGL volunteers were supported in December by staff from the large multi-disciplinary consultancy ARCADIS. During a day of corporate volunteering eight ecologists spent the day cutting, dragging and dead hedging which made a big difference to Pond 11 (below left).

Work at Wymott will continue in 2022, the aim being to reduce the shading of three ponds as prioritised at the site meeting in 2019.



Pond 9 before (above) and below (after).



Above: Staff from ARCADIS on their volunteer work day in December. Below: All felled material at Wymott was used to form a dead hedge (over 120m long).



ARGL's social media presence

During the year there were a number of discussions about ARGL's social media profile and the prevailing view was that this needed more attention. A new Instagram and Twitter account was set up and the aspiration was to make frequent posts to raise the profile of the group and attract more active members. (The Facebook group has 169 members but only a very small number attend events.) What ARGL really needs is more people to attend practical habitat management tasks, to take part in surveying and ideally people willing to help organise events. Without our volunteer efforts, many ponds would have been lost over the years. Practical tasks can be hard work, but also bring a sense of great satisfaction. If you are able to assist with ARGL's social media presence, please get in touch!