

ARGL Review of 2022

A look back over 2022

This year saw ARGL up and running again after COVID, highlights being the reptile surveys at Caddishead Moss and Highfield Moss, and pond habitat management at Wymott Prison near Preston. Volunteer numbers were lower than pre-COVID levels but nevertheless some great work has taken place. Thanks to all those who've made this possible!

Reptile surveys at Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) sites

The biggest disappointment of 2022 was a decision by Warrington Borough Council not to allow the reptile surveys, agreed early in 2020, to take place at Risley Moss. The main reason for this appears to have been a worry that information collected during the surveys would be publicised on social media, increasing the chance of unauthorised visits to Risley Moss by reptile enthusiasts. A commitment was given by ARGL not to share any data without authority from Warrington BC, but their decision was not up for discussion and no surveys were permitted.

However, nearby mossland sites also provide good reptile habitat, so the focus turned to sites owned by Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT). All reptiles are rare in the North West of England, so any targeted surveys provide useful information.

Neil Madden obtained permission to visit Caddishead Moss and Highfield Moss which were surveyed for reptiles in autumn. Neil distributed survey tins around the site and co-ordinated the surveys. A total of 13 and 20 viviparous lizards were recorded at Caddishead Moss and Highfield Moss respectively. The hope is that slow-worms may also be present, but none have been recorded so far. Further reptile surveys are planned for 2023.

Pond management in Bolton

In December ARGL returned to Darcy Lever Marshes in Bolton...17 years after the last habitat management task there. The Marshes is a Site of Biological Importance and supports great crested newts. An amazing amount of willow scrub has established itself since 2006 and all of the smaller ponds are now completely shaded. A meeting was held last year with Greater Manchester Ecology Unit when it was agreed that willow urgently needed to be removed to prevent the species of interest being lost. More work is planned next year.



"Where's the pond?" The eastern end of Darcy Lever Marshes before and after management work.



Your ARGL Committee for 2023

Chair: David Orchard

Database Manager: Lee Brady

Treasurer: Lorna Bousfield

Social Media: Natalie Woollacott and
Celise Taylor



groups.arguk.org/argl

More pond Management at Wymott Prison, near Preston

Last year's work at Wymott Prison continued this spring with another three habitat management tasks. Willow was removed from a pond which had been almost lost, (numbered pond 10 in the Phase 1 Habitat Survey) - see photos below. This was the third pond at Wymott to receive such management work from ARGL. Stumps were treated by the site manager and brash was used to create a dead hedge.



Pond 10 in early January (above) and in early March after (below) three habitat management tasks.



In May the group was asked to run a training day for Ministry of Justice (MoJ) staff which the group was pleased to do. The day included an indoor session on pond habitats and amphibians, delivered by David Orchard, and a field session on invertebrates delivered by Alan and Hilary Bedford. During the day, great crested newt eggs were found in a pond where they hadn't previously been recorded. The event was well received and helped raise awareness of the value of habitats on MoJ land and the species that can be found there.



*Above: ARGL volunteers at Wymott, January 16th 2022
Below: Training day for MoJ staff on May 5th 2022.*



Other ARGL activities in 2022

Barn Hey, near Preston. In February, ARGL assisted South Ribble Borough Council with pond management at Barn Hey. Work involved removing alder which was casting shade over a pond, and also removing willow from within the pond to allow it to be dredged by an excavator later in the year.

Rixton Claypits, near Warrington. In October, ARGL worked with Rangers from Warrington Borough Council to co-ordinate a volunteer work day for ARCADIS staff. All worked together to remove small willow and birch from a shaded pond edge to improve it as a breeding site for amphibians. This continues the work done with the Rangers over the past 10 years to help make Rixton Claypits, an outstanding habitat for great crested newts, even better.