

ARGL Review of 2025

Highlights of 2025

During 2025 three habitat management tasks were undertaken, completing pond management work at HMP Wymott and continuing the work at Pleasington. Reptile surveys continued at Chat Moss for the fourth year running.

Chat Moss reptile surveys

ARGL surveys at Chat Moss were co-ordinated by Neil Madden and focussed on Highfield Moss, Rindle Moss and Moss Side Farm. Viviparous lizard was recorded along with common frog and common toad. These surveys have been a great effort, so many thanks to all those who helped out.

Site Visit to Moss Side Farm

In September ARGL visited Moss Side Farm, owned by Natural England and part of the Chat Moss National Nature Reserve. The visit was again hosted by the site ranger Steve Ormerod who led a guided walk around the 154 hectare site. The previous ARGL visit was in May 2024 and the intervening period has given time for a substantial amount of willow regeneration. Seeing these changes first hand was worthwhile, illustrating the scale of the task ahead for Natural England. Restoration of the site to mossland will take many years and the immediate focus is on ditch blocking and re-wetting.

Pleasington

Work has continued at Pleasington, near Blackburn, where ponds were created by ARGL in 2008. Most of the work has involved the removal of overhanging trees but one of the ponds has also been cleared of *Typha*. A key part of this work was done by employee volunteers from ARCADIS, ten of whom helped with the management work in September. These ponds support common frog, common toad, smooth

and palmate newts and have been managed by ARGL since their creation.



Top: Before the management day in December

Middle: After work completed

Bottom: Dead hedging created along the site perimeter

Your ARGL Committee for 2026

Chair: David Orchard

Reptile Survey Lead: Neil Madden

Database Manager: Lee Brady



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Pond management completed at HMP Wymott

In spring ARGL returned to HMP Wymott, near Preston, for two pond management tasks. These completed work started in 2021 to manage six ponds on land owned by the Ministry of Justice. During the work in February, evidence of water vole presence was found and later confirmed by the Lancashire mammal recorder Tony Parker. This is an exciting new record for the site and could indicate that work to reduce shading at the pond edges, resulting in denser vegetation, has made this habitat more suitable for water voles. (Prior to the management work there was little or no vegetation around the pond edges.)



*Above: ARGL volunteers at Wymott in January
Below: Evidence of water voles found during pond management work in March.*



No further work is planned at Wymott for the time being as all the trees earmarked for removal have now been felled and the brash used to create habitat piles and dead hedging.

The next few years will be a time of significant change for HMP Wymott as a new prison is

being built on green belt land within its grounds. None of the existing ponds will be lost but it remains to be seen how the terrestrial habitat will be affected. ARGL has offered to advise on ways to use this development as an opportunity to improve the habitat for amphibians, but unfortunately the design process is confidential at this stage. Future surveys will hopefully show that great crested newts, present in two of the ponds, have spread to other ponds. Frog, toad and smooth newt are also found at Wymott.



*Top: Before the management day in February
Middle: After trees were removed from the pond edge
Bottom: One of the larger trees being removed from the pond*