

# ARGSL Review of 2014

## ARGSL highlights of 2014

- Habitat management for sand lizards on the Sefton Coast.
- Habitat management for amphibians at Witton Park.
- Attendance at Myerscough College Open Day and Southport Show to raise awareness of amphibians and reptiles.
- Educational visit to a school near Lancaster.
- 17 ponds surveyed for amphibians, resulting in the discovery of a new great crested newt pond.
- One pond managed for great crested newts near Garstang.

## Pond management at Witton Park

In December 2008 ARGSL created six new ponds in Witton Park, Blackburn. Since then the ponds and surrounding area have been monitored and managed by ARGSL, showing the group's long term commitment to its projects. Two habitat management task days took place in 2014 during which vegetation was removed from some of the ponds and trees were removed from their edges. Brash was used to deter access to one of the more sensitive areas and earlier in the year a large area of balsam was cleared.



*Dead hedging at Witton Park*

## Your ARGSL Committee for 2014

Chair: David Orchard  
Database Manager: Lee Brady  
Treasurer: Denis Dowsell  
Website Manager: Chris Arthur

## Amphibian Surveys in 2014

ARGSL was pleased to survey 17 ponds on 3 sites this year, 11 of which have been created by ARGSL. Most of the ponds were developing well although a few were suffering from disturbance from dogs. Six of the ponds near Standish, Wigan, were created in 2010 and they have been surveyed every year since then. The ponds were colonised by frogs, toads, smooth and palmate newts in their first year but this year's survey included a pleasant surprise: great crested newt eggs in one of the ponds. The nearest great crested newt pond is over 500m away and although newts are known to disperse over this distance it was not expected that they would colonise this pond so quickly.



*One of the ponds near Whitefield created by ARGSL in 2009, now a great crested newt breeding pond.*

This follows a similar success story from ponds near Whitefield, created by ARGSL in 2009. Within the first year all were used as breeding ponds by frogs and smooth newts and after 3 years great crested newts were also present. As with the ponds near Standish the nearest breeding pond was over 500m away which reinforces the importance of creating new ponds. As well as being excellent habitats for amphibians ponds host a whole community of invertebrates including dragonflies, damselflies and water beetles.

ARGSL has created over 50 ponds since it was formed in 2004, some of which have been funded by searches of its records database. The group is always keen to work with others to make the most of pond creation opportunities.

## ARGSL volunteers help manage the Sefton Coast for sand lizards

Some of the most important sand dune habitats in Britain can be found on the Sefton Coast. Among the species found there are nationally significant populations of sand lizard and natterjack toad, both of which are under threat from public pressure, natural succession and coastal erosion.

For over 10 years North Merseyside ARG (NMARG) has worked hard to monitor the status of both species. Their findings indicate that populations have declined, most likely due to an increase in scrubby vegetation and habitat fragmentation. Much of the scrubby growth is Sea Buckthorn, an introduced species which has little benefit for local wildlife. Without management it can spread quickly and cast dense shade. Such habitat is of no value for sand lizards or natterjacks, both of which prefer open sunny habitats with patches of short vegetation and open ground. The more the Sefton dunes become dominated by dense vegetation, the less suitable they become for sand lizards and natterjacks.



*Some willow scrub earmarked for removal.*

In the past, sand dunes habitats were lost to coastal erosion but replaced by the creation of new dune systems elsewhere. Over the last 50 years or so, housing development and coastal stabilisation has led to the Sefton dunes becoming progressively more densely vegetated. The only way to maintain the habitat for sand lizards and natterjacks is to remove the

invasive scrub by hand which is labour intensive work.

NMARG has held regular tasks to remove willow, birch and Sea Buckthorn. Nevertheless, in recent years the extent of the challenge has kept growing so in 2014 NMARG invited other groups to help out with the essential work.



*Volunteers from ARGSL and Bangor University.*

In February ARGSL organised a joint task weekend with NMARG which saw the removal of two large areas of scrub. The weekend was supported by over 25 volunteers, including 14 from the University of Bangor Herpetological Society. The task weekend was a great success and the work will be of particular benefit to sand lizards which have been recorded in the area. Further scrub removal has since been undertaken by volunteers from South West Wales ARG. The work will continue in 2015, guided by the survey results of NMARG.



*One patch of willow cleared.*



Amphibian and Reptile Group  
of South Lancashire

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