

# ARGSL Review of 2016

## ARGSL highlights of 2016

- Organising the ARG UK North West Regional conference.
- Habitat management for great crested newts at Rixton Claypits.
- Surveying for amphibians in partnership with The Manchester Museum, starting with an amphibian survey training event in April.

## Surveying in partnership with The Manchester Museum

In spring Andrew Gray, senior herpetologist at The Manchester Museum, contacted ARGSL and asked whether the Museum could support any local herp conservation efforts. Surveying ponds for amphibians has always been a key part of ARGSL's work so Andrew offered to help out during the survey season.

The plan was to involve students who had been volunteering at the Museum. Most had no previous survey experience with British amphibians so the starting point was a training day at Rixton Claypits. This covered species identification and survey methods and it was attended by twelve volunteers.

Greater Manchester Ecology Unit provided a list of ponds on county wildlife sites (Sites of Biological Importance, or SBI's) that had not been surveyed for some time. Over the spring nine ponds on three sites were visited and up to date survey information was collected. None of this would have been possible without this collaborative approach and hopefully it will be possible to build on this in future years.

## ARGSL funds work in North Wales

This year ARGSL helped create 19 sand patches for sand lizards at Talacre in North Wales by providing £250 to cover the cost of hiring of a small excavator. This continues ARGSL's habitat management work of previous years to improve the dune habitat for sand lizards and natterjack toads.

## The November Conference

The main event of ARGSL's year was organising the ARG UK Regional Conference at The Manchester Museum on November 19th. Delegates came from far afield including Kent, Peterborough and the North East.

The conference was made possible thanks to support from The Manchester Museum which allowed the use of their venue free of charge. Nearly 80 people registered and feedback has been very positive. The varied line-up of speakers included Dr. Robert Jehle from the University of Salford, Dr. Trent Garner from the Institute of Zoology, John Newton from Yorkshire ARG and Angela Julian from ARC. ARGSL's David Orchard spoke about the age and population size of great crested newts in the North West of England and Rick Parker spoke about his pond creation work at Blackleach Country Park in Salford.

A number of talks focussed on genetics as these techniques are playing an increasingly important role in herp-related research. ARGSL plans to host another regional conference in the future, possibly in 2018.



*A great day out! Some ARGSL members at the November conference.*

## Your ARGSL Committee for 2017

Chair: David Orchard  
Database Manager: Lee Brady  
Treasurer: Lorna Bousfield



Amphibian and Reptile Group  
of South Lancashire

[www.argsl.org.uk](http://www.argsl.org.uk)  
[argsl@btinternet.co.uk](mailto:argsl@btinternet.co.uk)

## Work at Rixton Claypits SSSI & SAC

ARGSL has again focussed its habitat management work on Rixton Claypits (near Warrington). Work that started last year, to open up a woodland ride between several of the ponds, has been continued. This has increased the diversity of the terrestrial habitat and made some small ponds suitable for breeding amphibians.



*ARGSL's work has increased the habitat diversity at Rixton.*

Rixton Claypits remains the focus for ARGSL's volunteer tasks, not just because it is so important for great crested newts, but also because the rangers are so well organised. Their experience means they know how to get through lots of work with volunteers and working efficiently on task days is one of the main reasons that ARGSL keeps going back to work at Rixton. Tasks this year involved the removal of birch and willow scrub with chainsaws being used for most of the felling work. One of the events was supported by Bangor University Herp Soc and another by The University of Salford Wildlife Society. Both groups provided a mini-bus full of volunteers for each task day.

More tasks are planned for 2017. Keep an eye on the website for further information!



*Volunteers at Rixton on February 27th*

## Looking ahead to 2017: The Bolton Reptile Survey Project

Over recent years there have been consistent and tantalising reports of both slow-worm and adder sightings in the Bolton area. Some moorland areas support common lizard but evidence for the distribution of all three species is scarce. Some are old records collected by ARGSL at public events, the earliest of which is 1953. More recent records have come from reports in the Bolton Evening News. Perhaps the most exciting of these (a slow-worm found in a garden in the Smithills area) included a link to You-Tube showing the juvenile slow-worm itself - definitely a benefit of modern technology! Other records are more anecdotal and arise from bite marks said to be from adders. It seems highly likely that adders are present in isolated areas but there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding this. There are no reliable grass snake records for most of Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

Landowners need to be aware of the presence of reptiles before they can be encouraged to manage their sites with them in mind. All reptiles are rare across the North West of England so all records are extremely valuable.

ARGSL's Martyn Barnes is planning to find out more about these elusive animals with a survey project in 2017. This will use historic records to target the areas for survey work. A series of transects are planned, together with the use of refugia in carefully selected areas.

Surveying for reptiles requires more skill, patience and tenacity than surveying for amphibians and given the low reptile numbers in the North West it is not a job for the faint hearted! All being well Martyn will find some new records in 2017 which would be the basis of future conservation work.

If you are interested in surveying for reptiles in 2017, please get in touch for further information.

## What's in Your Garden Pond?

If you're able to visit a garden pond over the coming year, please take a good look and let us know which amphibians you find. We're interested in receiving all garden pond records so please get involved and submit your records at [www.whatsinyourpond.org.uk](http://www.whatsinyourpond.org.uk)



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