

ARGL Review of 2020

A look back over 2020

Despite the impact of Coronavirus, 2020 was a successful year for ARGL. Eight habitat management tasks took place, in addition to which a slow-worm survey was conducted, work was started on an extensive reptile survey at Risley Moss and a plant ID skills day was held at Rixton Claypits. A large part of this success has been due to the enthusiasm of members, some of whom volunteered to organise events. Well done Melissa, Neil and Natalie! The year ended with ARGL's first virtual AGM which was much better attended than previous years.

Risley Moss reptile surveys

Risley Moss is an excellent site for many species due to the careful work done by the Ranger team over the past 20 years. In 2020 ARGL was due to start an extensive reptile survey to help inform future management recommendations. 20 sheets of corrugated iron were purchased with a grant from the ARG UK 100% Fund, from which 60 reptile refugia tins were created. A training day was held in March to confirm the survey methodology but before all the tins could be distributed the site was closed due to COVID restrictions. The reptile surveys will begin next year, as soon as COVID restrictions allow.

Slow-worm survey near Sale

This year ARGL volunteers surveyed a site near Sale Water Park where, in 2015, one male, two female and one juvenile slow-worm were released as part of a development related translocation project. 15 refugia were used and checked 9 times between March and October, but no reptiles were found. This may have been due to the difficulty of finding a small number of individuals on a large the receptor site, or it could demonstrate that such a small number of individuals was not sufficient to provide the basis of a viable population.

Your ARGL Committee in 2020

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

ARGL highlights of 2020

- Habitat management tasks at Pleasington, Risley Moss and Barn Hey.
- Slow-worm survey near Sale.
- Preliminary reptile surveys at Risley Moss.
- Plant ID day at Rixton Claypits.

Management work at Risley Moss

In spring two habitat management tasks were held at Risley Moss (SAC, SSSI) during which scrub was removed to help restore the mossland habitat. Much of the felled material was used to create a large hibernacula. Further management work is due to continue in 2021.



Above: ARGL volunteers at Risley Moss.

Below: Hibernaculum after the second task.



Habitat Management of ponds in Pleasington

ARGL has created over 50 ponds since it was formed in 2004. Six of these were created in 2008 near Pleasington, to the South West of Blackburn, on land owned by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. The ponds were created to provide amphibian breeding ponds and to increase habitat diversity for other aquatic species. The most recent amphibian survey was conducted in 2011, during which the common frog, common toad, smooth and palmate newt were recorded. In 2020 ARGL returned to the site to undertake essential management work and to create a seventh new pond.



Pond creation work in December 2008.

Five habitat management tasks took place in 2020. The first was in January, during which willow branches were removed to reduce shading of ponds, and the brash was used to form a dead hedge. Two tasks in late summer focussed on the removal of Himalayan balsam and the final two, in October/December, saw the creation of a new pond which was dug by hand.



One of the ponds created by ARGL in July 2011.



The new pond dug by hand in autumn 2020.

In contrast to the ponds created in 2008 the new pond is shallow (approximately 300mm deep) and in full sun, providing further diversity to the pond complex. Of all the ponds created by ARGL this is only the second one to be dug by hand.

In 2021 the plan is to conduct an amphibian survey of the ponds and undertake further tree thinning in autumn.

Barn Hey, Leyland



In February a pond management day was held in partnership with South Ribble Borough Council. Trees were removed to allow more light to the pond margins and the tree stumps were left high so that they could be re-cut and treated by the Rangers.

Update on work at HMP Wymott

Following a very positive meeting in late 2019, ARGL had been planning to undertake both surveys and habitat management work at HMP Wymott this year. Unfortunately the work has not yet been given the go-ahead, but hopefully progress will be made in the New Year.

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