

ARGL Review of 2023

A look back over 2023

ARGL's achievements over the past year include seven habitat management tasks and reptile surveys on mosslands to the west of Manchester. The group has also been nominated for an award by the Ministry of Justice following work done at HMP Wymott, near Leyland (winners to be announced in January 2024).

Pond management continues at HMP Wymott,

For the third year running pond management work continued at HMP Wymott, with three habitat management tasks taking place to improve ponds for amphibians. Removal of overhanging willow was completed at one pond and work to the second is due to be finished in spring 2024. (Excessive shading means fewer plants, fewer invertebrates and fewer amphibians.) Brash was stacked to create over 100m of dead hedges.



Wymott: one of the ponds with management work finished, February 27th.

Darcy Lever Marshes

Three pond management tasks were held at Darcy Lever Marshes, removing willow which had been shading out a number of ponds. (Brash had to be burnt to prevent it from becoming a fire risk in the summer.) This work

was started last year and done in partnership with Bolton Conservation Volunteers. Efforts will continue next year to return this County Wildlife Site to good condition, allowing the mosaic of habitats to thrive.



Above: Pond edge at Darcy Lever, January 12th

Below: Pond edges by late afternoon on the same day.



...and Pleasington

ARGL also returned to a pond complex at Pleasington, near Blackburn, created by the group in 2008. Management work on one pond was completed and work on others is scheduled to continue next year. Brash was used to create over 60m of dead hedging. ARGL's long term commitment to these ponds is important. Without it this work would not take place, resulting in the loss of amphibian breeding ponds.

Your ARGL Committee for 2024

Chair: David Orchard

Database Manager: Lee Brady

Treasurer: Lorna Bennett



groups.arguk.org/argl



Some ARGL volunteers at Pleasington on December 10th

ARGL pledges to support Natural England mossland restoration

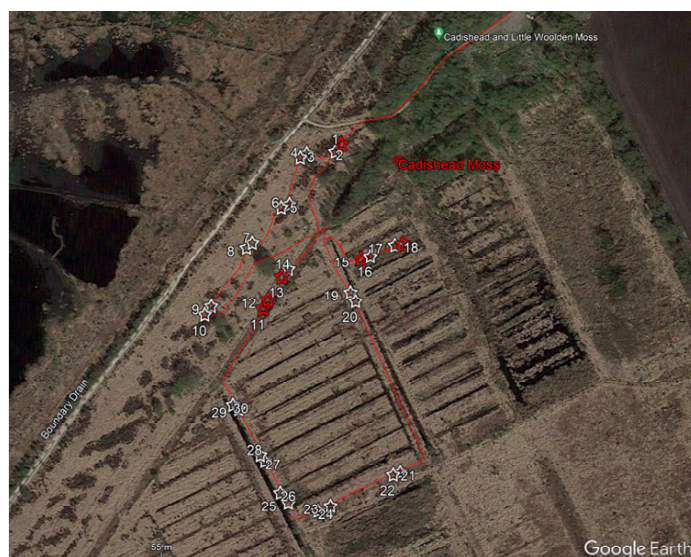
In September ARGL hosted an online meeting with Natural England to discuss ways in which the group can support an exciting project to restore land at Moss Side Farm, a 154 hectare site between Astley and Salford. This was recently acquired by Natural England and ARGL has offered to support the project in any way it can. In addition to providing valuable amphibian and reptile habitat, the restored mossland will provide a unique habitat for a host of plant and invertebrate species, as well as helping with carbon storage. The immediate priority is for reptile surveys to confirm whether any species are present here and ARGL began these in autumn. ARGL volunteers Alan and Hilary Bedford are also conducting an investigation into small mammal populations based on owl pellets.

This is one of the most exciting and innovative restoration projects in the North West and supporting it will be a key priority for ARGL over the coming years.

Reptile surveys on the Manchester Mosses.

ARGL continued to survey for reptiles on the Manchester Mosses and recorded viviparous lizard at three Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) sites: Rindle, Highfield and Cadishead Moss. Reptile transects were set up at each site and small numbers of tins distributed (30 at each site in groups of 10). A WhatsApp group was used to help coordinate surveyor effort and five visits made to each site. In addition to the viviparous

lizard, common frog and common toad were also recorded. The rapidly developing mossland habitat appears suitable for other species, so future surveys should provide some interesting results.



Aerial photo of Cadishead Moss showing the location of survey tins. (Red stars indicate location of viviparous lizard.)

Significantly, LWT reported two grass snakes from Rindle Moss which is excellent news as this species is exceptionally rare in Lancashire. As habitats develop during the mossland restoration work, these records are expected to become more frequent.

All reptiles are rare in North West England, so building up a better understanding of where populations are doing well supports conservation efforts to support them. Over the past 20 years, most of ARGL's work has focussed on amphibians so it's great to do more for reptiles.

Survey work is time consuming, so more volunteers would be welcome. If you're new to this, training will be given.

2024 will be our 20th Anniversary!

ARGL was established in 2004, and reaching a 20th anniversary is quite an achievement! A range of activities have been undertaken over the 20 years, all helping to support the conservation of amphibians and reptiles with practical measures. Effective conservation needs long term planning, but most of all it needs committed volunteers. Long term survival of the group and its work (for the next 20 years and beyond) depends on attracting new members. Whilst realising that volunteering with ARGL isn't for everyone, there will be people who would enjoy aspects of this work if only they knew about it. Please help us to find these people!