

Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

The great crested newt is the largest of England's native newt species, growing to about 15cm long. It is dark, speckled with small white spots, has an orange or yellow belly, and males in the breeding season have a pronounced, 'toothed' crest. Adult great crested newts are found in well-vegetated ponds during the breeding season (generally April-July), and in adjacent terrestrial habitats for the rest of the year. They require breeding ponds, generally with a surface area of approximately 250m², and a depth of approximately 1m. Aquatic vegetation is important for egg-laying and ponds should ideally lack fish, which predate larvae, should not be heavily used by wildfowl, and should not be subject to regular drying out (i.e. early in every summer). Larvae remain in the pond later in the year than adults, and some may remain in the pond over the winter.

Terrestrial habitats, such as scrub, woodland, rough grassland and hedgerows are required for the non-aquatic phase of the life-cycle. The habitats within 500m of breeding ponds are generally considered to be the most important for foraging newts and these will also contain features suitable for hibernation (rock/brick piles, stone walls and dead wood), which provide a moist environment and a stable cool temperature. Newts hibernate during late autumn and winter.

The UKBAP Priority Habitats of importance to this species, which occur within the soft estate, are: ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows, eutrophic standing waters, fens, lowland woodlands (all), lowland wood pasture and parkland, lowland meadows, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and wet woodland.

Current status

National status

The great crested newt is listed on Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention. It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations (1994) and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). The great crested newt is listed as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Great crested newts are widespread and locally numerous throughout England, but absent or rare in Cornwall and Devon. They are, however, declining at a rate of around 2% of colonies lost over five years. The British population is amongst the largest in Europe.

Status on the network

Great crested newts are present in all areas of the network, with the possible exception of area 1. There is only one reference to great crested newts in the Highways Agency network ecological information, on the A14. However, it is likely that the species is significantly under-recorded on road verges and associated wetland features, owing to a shortage of targeted amphibian surveys (particularly associated with their use of terrestrial habitats).



Current factors affecting the species

Loss of ponds or terrestrial habitats

Great crested newt ponds are threatened by water table reduction, in-filling and pollution, which can all result from new road developments and improvements. Adjacent terrestrial habitats can also be threatened by development schemes. Lack of management can also cause the decline of the value of these habitats for great crested newts. Leaf-fall into ponds is a particular problem.

Habitat fragmentation

Large roads can act as barriers to movement between habitats and to dispersal, leading to fragmentation of populations.

Road-traffic related mortality

Where roads cross migration routes, they can lead to the deaths of great crested newts, as they try to move between aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and between ponds. This is relevant to both new and existing schemes. Drainage (in lay-bys, slip roads etc.) is often a particular threat.

Current action

Newt surveys are carried out as part of the Environmental Assessment process for any proposed new scheme, and thus avoidance or mitigation can be proposed at the earliest possible stage.

Advice on the maintenance of links for amphibians to their breeding ponds, and on the creation and management of wetland habitat, is provided in the DMRB, and in more detail in English Nature's Species Conservation Handbook, along with survey, assessment and mitigation procedures. Purpose-built amphibian tunnels along with appropriate fencing, are now incorporated into the design of most new roads, where necessary.

English Nature have published "*Great-crested newt mitigation guidelines*".

A National Recording Scheme monitors some known and potential sites for great crested newts.

Objectives

The aim of the Highways Agency Species Action Plan for great crested newts is to maintain and enhance great crested newt populations that occur within the soft estate, through protection and appropriate management of suitable habitat, and to prevent or adequately mitigate any adverse impacts of new road schemes on the species and its habitat.

	Objective	Proposed actions
A	To avoid impacts of new road schemes or improvements on great crested newts and their habitats.	6
B	To mitigate unavoidable impacts on great crested newts and/or their habitats.	4, 7
C	To raise the awareness of HA staff, Managing Agents and consultants regarding the significance of great crested newts on the network.	1, 2, 11
D	To develop a greater knowledge of the distribution of great crested newts in the soft estate.	3
E	To safeguard and enhance known great crested newt populations in the soft estate.	4, 5, 8, 9, 10

Proposed action

The following table lists the actions required to achieve the objectives set out in this Plan. For some of the actions, potential partners have

been assigned as likely sources of cooperation. Targets are provided to give an indication of the timescale for the proposed action.

	Action	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Policy, guidance and advice</i>		
1	Provide detailed information in TRMM/DMRB on the management of highway vegetation for the benefit of great crested newts.	-	2005
2	Publish an Advice Note on Amphibians in Volume 10 of the DMRB, to include great crested newts.	-	2003
	<i>Research and monitoring</i>		
3	Collate records of great crested newt ponds on or close to the network, and undertake targeted primary survey work to identify the most sensitive sites. Record all breeding ponds on the Environmental Database. Identify the likely terrestrial habitat used by newts from these breeding ponds.	LBRCs, WTs	2006
4	Monitor all translocation and enhancement sites as part of infrastructure costs.	-	Ongoing
	<i>Mitigation and Management</i>		
5	Adequate pollution control measures need to be introduced on new and existing roads where great crested newt ponds are known to be present. Salt is particularly toxic to amphibians and this should be taken into account when providing road salting facilities.	EA	Ongoing
6	For all new road schemes and road improvements, include search for records of great crested newts in desk study at stage 1 and targeted surveys at stage 2. Early identification of this constraint may allow impacts to be avoided. Wherever possible, retain all existing features of importance for great crested newts.	-	Ongoing
7	Where impacts of new schemes and road improvements on great crested newts and their habitats are unavoidable, consider the options for protection, translocation, habitat recreation, improvement and enhancement, and consider mitigation of fragmentation by maintaining safe road crossings. Create 150 new ponds or hibernacula.	-	2010
8	Where great crested newts are known to occur within the soft estate, maintenance works should be carried out in accordance with best practice guidelines and current legislation.	-	Ongoing
9	Where existing problems are identified, e.g. mortality on existing roads, consider options to introduce appropriate mitigation, e.g. amphibian-proof fences and tunnels.	-	Ongoing

	Action (continued)	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Mitigation and Management (continued)</i>		
10	Ensure that terrestrial habitats near to breeding ponds are managed according to best practice.	-	Ongoing
	<i>Communications and publicity</i>		
11	Information on great crested newts should be included in environmental training for HA staff and Managing Agents.	-	From 2002

Links with other plans

This plan should be read in conjunction with the HAPs for woodland, water features, boundary features and grasslands.

Species Action Plans have been prepared for the great crested newt in numerous LBAPs. The species is also a Regional Biodiversity Indicator in English Nature's South East, East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, North West and North East Regions.

Lead partners

The joint lead partners for the great-crested newt in the UKBAP are the Herpetological Conservation Trust, Froglife and the British Herpetological Society.