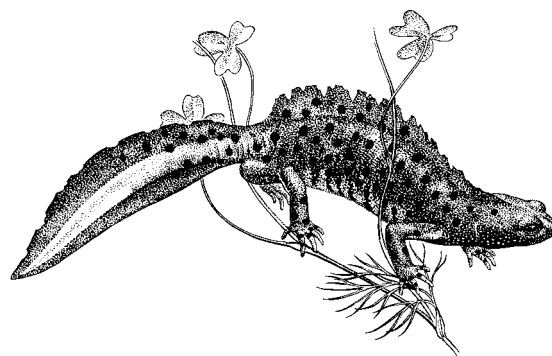


# Great Crested Newt

*The national rate of colony loss is approximately 2% over 5 years*



## Ecology

The great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) is the largest of the three British native newt species, reaching a maximum length of 15cm for males and 17cm for females<sup>1</sup>. It has a dark, often black warty skin speckled with tiny white spots and an orange or yellow belly with black blotches. During the breeding season in spring, the males develop a high wavy crest along their backs.

Great crested newts become sexually mature after one to three years and return to ponds in spring to breed. They lay their eggs singly on underwater leaves near the water margin, folding the leaves over to protect the eggs. Eggs can be laid between late February and early August, but are usually found from April to June. The tadpoles normally take three months to develop into young newts, but some may over-winter as tadpoles. Great

crested newt tadpoles tend to swim in open water making them more vulnerable to predation by fish than other newt tadpoles. Adult newts leave their ponds from July onwards, generally staying within 250m<sup>1</sup> of the breeding pond. Small numbers of individual newts mainly juveniles may disperse up to 1km as colonisers.<sup>1</sup> When temperatures start to fall in October or November, they hibernate in damp, frost-free environments generally underground.

On land, great crested newts are usually active at night, spending the day in cool, moist conditions under debris or in dense vegetation. They feed on land and in water eating aquatic animals such as water hog lice, tadpoles and insect larvae and terrestrial invertebrates, such as worms. Newt larvae feed on very small aquatic invertebrates such as water fleas.

## Habitat description

- ◆ Great crested newts need clean, preferably fish-free ponds or small reservoirs in which to breed. The most suitable ponds are over 50cm deep with well-developed aquatic vegetation. Waterbodies, where fish and waterfowl are more common, are generally avoided.
- ◆ Pondscapes (mosaics of terrestrial and aquatic habitat) supporting several breeding populations (metapopulations) are more robust than isolated ponds/populations.
- ◆ The availability of suitable terrestrial habitats near the pond is necessary for feeding, daytime refuges and hibernation. These include dense, matted grassland, marsh, reedbeds, tall herb vegetation, low scrub and piles of logs and stones.
- ◆ There is some evidence to suggest that at least one hectare of good terrestrial habitat is necessary to support between 100 and 300 adult newts.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ Hedgerows, ditches and field margins may be important for newt dispersal.

## Current status and distribution

### International

The great crested newt is widespread from the UK in the west, through southern Scandinavia and Central Europe; to the southwestern part of West Siberia.<sup>2</sup> It is absent from Ireland and southern Europe. Great crested newt populations are believed to be declining throughout much of Europe and the species is threatened in several countries.

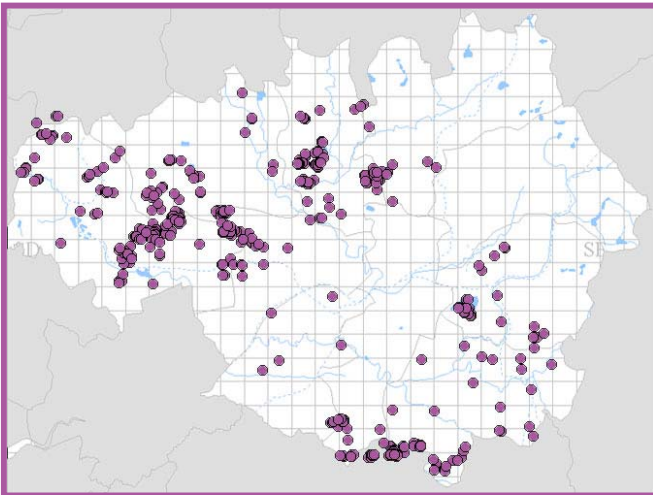
### National

The great crested newt is still quite widespread in Great Britain and is numerous locally in parts of lowland England, but the species has suffered a significant decline in recent years. Studies in the 1980's indicated a national rate of colony loss of approximately 2% over five years. It is estimated that great crested newts occur in approximately 18,000 ponds, but only 3,000 have been identified to date. The British population is among the largest in Europe and Britain therefore has an international responsibility for the species.<sup>3</sup>

### Greater Manchester

Great crested newts are considered to be common but declining in Greater Manchester. The exact population of the species in the county is unknown, as are the locations of all ponds that support newts.

Some areas such as Wigan, Bury, Bolton and parts of Salford have been well studied and surveyed. Elsewhere knowledge is more limited. It is believed that Greater Manchester has a high concentration of great crested newt ponds that could be significant in national terms. Great crested newts are believed to breed in all districts of Greater Manchester. Particularly high concentrations of great crested newts are found in Wigan, and the border between Salford and Bolton.



Distribution of Great Crested Newts in Greater Manchester

## Legal

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 (as amended) and schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This means that the

law protects great crested newts against trade, transport, possession, capture, injury, killing or disturbance. In addition their habitat also receives legal protection from disturbance.

## Factors affecting the species

### International

Great crested newts are protected by European legislation under EC Habitats Directive. It is on the IUCN red list of threatened species. Reasons for decline are similar to those in the UK, with the addition of trapping for the pet trade in parts of the former Soviet Union.

### National

- ◆ Direct loss of breeding ponds and terrestrial habitats to development is declining but is still a factor.
- ◆ Fragmentation of habitat, both terrestrial and aquatic due to development
- ◆ Loss of suitable breeding ponds as a result of natural succession
- ◆ Introduction of fish to breeding ponds
- ◆ Decline in water quality of ponds due to pollution, including agrochemical run-off

- ◆ Infilling of ponds on agricultural land
- ◆ Water table reduction due to drainage or water abstraction

#### Greater Manchester

- ◆ As for National, with direct loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation as a result of development, fish introduction and loss through succession particularly important issues.
- ◆ Reclamation of derelict land may have a negative impact on the species.
- ◆ A lack of baseline information for some Boroughs.
- ◆ Non-native species such as Canada geese and *Crassula helmsill* are causing localised problems.

#### Long-term trends and potential threats

- ◆ Pressure from residential, industrial and infrastructure development is likely to continue
- ◆ The effects of climate change on great crested newts and their habitats are difficult to predict, but changes in the amount and distribution of rainfall could affect breeding ponds and therefore newt populations.

## Great Crested Newt

- ◆ The current lack of management of waterbodies and associated habitats in the agricultural and industrial sectors is unlikely to change leading to succession of farm ponds and potentially to dam failure in mill lodges.
- ◆ Increased protection through the legal and planning system as a result of European rulings, NERC Act and LDF system.

## Current actions

#### International

- ◆ EC rulings have continued to strengthen implementation of the habitats directive.
- ◆ Development of the Pan-European Ecological Network will help to reverse fragmentation of wetlands habitats on mainland Europe.
- ◆ The EU through the Life Nature Fund have supported a number of projects including the New-life to Europe's Oldest reptile and amphibians in Poland, Lithuania and Germany and Protection of Great crested newts in the Eastern Baltic Region in Estonia, Finland and Denmark.

## National

- ◆ The “Great Crest Newt Mitigation Guidelines” 2001 available free from the Natural England website, and Froglife provide detailed requirements for great crested newt survey and mitigation<sup>1,4</sup>.
- ◆ Requirement for licences from DEFRA where development is proposed, and conservation licenses from Natural England where management or survey activities require the disturbance of great crested newts and their habitat
- ◆ A Wildlife Licensing Unit based in Bristol and Peterborough now deals with all European Protected species license applications including great crested newts. [European Protected Species licensing presentations](#)
- ◆ A species action plan has been prepared for great crested newts as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Over seventy local action plans have also been produced.
- ◆ Twenty-two sites have been designated Natura 2000 sites where great crested newts are a primary reason for the SAC designation. A further 10 SAC's

include great crested newts as a qualifying reason.<sup>6</sup>

- ◆ Under Regulation 44 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 (as amended), three tests have to be met before Natural England will grant a license for an activity that may harm the Conservation status of the great crested newt. In summary these are that there is no suitable alternative site, the development is of overriding public interest and that the favourable conservation status of the newts can be maintained. The UK has recently strengthened its interpretation of Habitats Directive, through amendments to the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) 1994 removing several defences i.e. previously lawful activities that were found under Regulation 40 and given responsibility in Scotland to the Scottish Parliament.

## Greater Manchester

- ◆ GMEU and local authorities consider impacts of developments on known great crested newt sites when reviewing planning applications.

- ◆ The Pondlife Project undertook surveys of a number of ponds in Greater Manchester from 1995 to 1998.
- ◆ The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside undertook surveys of ponds in the north of the county, in the 1990's adding to information on the occurrence of great crested newts.
- ◆ Bolton Conservation Volunteers and The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside are active in pond creation and management.
- ◆ There is awareness amongst Greater Manchester local authorities of the status and requirements of the species and the need for surveys when a development is planned within 250 metres of a known or potential great crested newt ponds.
- ◆ Bolton and Wigan Councils have local species action plans for great crested newts.
- ◆ Bury Council has recently funded a survey of all waterbodies below 0.5 hectares in the Borough which found 61 breeding ponds including five new

## Great Crested Newt

metapopulations.<sup>7</sup>

- ◆ GMEU holds information on known great crested newt ponds on GIS for all of Greater Manchester.

## Objectives and targets

### National

- ◆ Maintain the geographical range of the great crested newt.
- ◆ Maintain the viability of existing great crested newt populations.

## Greater Manchester

Objective	Target	Target Date
Determine the current population and range of great crested newts in the county.	Establish the principle that baseline data on protected species is essential for the Local Development Framework process and in order for Local Authorities to meet their biodiversity duty under section 40 NERC Act.  Ensure that all opportunities to carry out surveys are taken.	2010
Maintain the range, distribution and viability of great crested newt populations across Greater Manchester at no less than 2000 levels, including new sites discovered after this date as a result of base-line survey work.	Establish a network of 'indicator ponds' throughout Greater Manchester to be monitored on a five year rolling programme	2010
Identify potential areas for expansion of GCN distribution in the county, targeting sites that would create linkages between currently isolated populations.	Identify 'pond ways' and ecological enhancement areas that would link existing isolated populations in LDF's with the aim of using section 106's and planning gain when potential sites come forward for development.	10 new sites by 2015

## Proposed actions

### Policy

- ◆ Ensure the importance of great crested newts and their associated habitats is recognised and protection and

enhancement policies are included in LDF Core Strategies, or as Supplementary planning documents. GMEU, LA's. Ongoing

- ◆ Ensure all planning applications are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on great crested newts and their habitat. Loss or damage is avoided and if this is unavoidable, opportunities are taken for mitigation and or compensation. LA's, GMEU, WT's. Ongoing

#### Site Safeguard

- ◆ Identify and secure areas for potential expansion of great crested newt habitat (to reduce isolation and fragmentation of sites) through LDF ecological enhancement areas. GMEU, LA's. Ongoing through LDF cycle.
- ◆ Identify all ponds known to hold populations of great crested newts and likely terrestrial habitat associated with the ponds in Local Development Frameworks and planning constraint systems. GMEU, LA's. Ongoing

#### Land Management

- ◆ Promote and encourage favourable management of habitats associated with great crested newt where the species is known to occur on local authority land holdings, through long-term conservation management plans or agreements. Compile list of publicly owned GCN breeding ponds by 2010

and management plans for sites by 2011. GMEU, LA's. 2010/11

#### Species Management

- ◆ Produce a report Considering translocation or re-introduction programmes to restore populations to previously occupied or appropriate new sites where natural colonisation is unlikely. NE, GMBP. 2010 for report, 2012 first scheme if warranted

#### Advisory

- ◆ Promote Natural England, JNCC and Froglife guidelines on best practice for great crested newt management, to LA's, developers, and land managers. FWAG, LA's, WT's, GMBP. Ongoing
- ◆ Mail landowners on availability of grant aid in conjunction with other species and habitat action plans. DEFRA, FWAG, NE. Mailing List established by 2010. Biennial mail shots thereafter

#### Future Research and Monitoring

- ◆ Pursue funding and undertake survey of great crested newts using standardised and repeatable methodology. GMBP. 2010
- ◆ Maintain central database of all sites where great crested newts are found



including details of the condition of associated habitats and potential expansion areas. Make this information available to key partners. **GMEU. Ongoing**

- ◆ Contribute to increasing information on UK great crested newts by submitting information from GM database to National Biodiversity Network web based catalogue on survey information. **GM LRC. Ongoing**
- ◆ Submit details of relevant conservation achievements to the national biodiversity reporting system, BARS, to meet requested deadlines. **GMBP. Ongoing**
- ◆ Develop and implement appropriate surveillance and monitoring programmes to assess progress toward action plan targets on 10 sites across Greater Manchester to ensure that management is appropriate. **GMBP. Develop by 2010, First Baseline survey 2011**

## Communication and Publicity

- ◆ Seek opportunities to raise the profile of great crested newts and their habitats in the media and improve public awareness of its wildlife and

conservation value through events, interpretation and production of leaflets. **All BAP partners. Ongoing**

## LEAD PARTNERS

<b>DEFRA</b>	Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
<b>EA</b>	Environment Agency
<b>FWAG</b>	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
<b>GMBP</b>	Greater Manchester Biodiversity Project
<b>GMEU</b>	Greater Manchester Ecology Unit
<b>GM LRC</b>	Greater Manchester Local Record Centre
<b>LA's</b>	Local Authorities
<b>NE</b>	Natural England
<b>WT's</b>	The Wildlife Trusts

## Best practice guidelines

- ◆ Ponds and other waterbodies should be kept free from predatory fish. Occasional drying up can be good as it prevents fish from becoming established. Ponds however, need to retain open water for the majority of breeding and larval development seasons to ensure adequate numbers of new recruits into the local population.

- ◆ Silt or water plants should not excessively choke ponds and other waterbodies.
- ◆ Management of ponds and other waterbodies should only be undertaken in late autumn and winter when newts are absent. Only a small percentage of the pond area should be managed in any one year to leave sections undisturbed as refuges. A conservation license may be required from Natural England to manage a great crested newt pond or site.
- ◆ Ponds and waterbodies should be largely unshaded, especially on the south side, to let the water warm up. Trees and shrubs however add to the value of the terrestrial habitat and if positioned to the north of the pond can assist in the warming of the local microclimate.
- ◆ Piles of logs or heaps of rubble should be left as daytime refuges and hibernation sites. Purpose built hibernacula can be provided.
- ◆ Chemicals should not normally be used in great crested newt ponds or on land around them. A license will be required from the EA if the waterbody concerned

## Great Crested Newt

is connected to a watercourse.

- ◆ Areas of rough, long grass should be encouraged providing daytime refuges during the summer months.
- ◆ Where there are clusters of waterbodies with existing or potential newt populations, management should aim to provide corridors of suitable habitat such as ditches and long grass to link them.

Further information about Great Crested Newts can be found here:

[Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines](#),  
Natural England

[Brief Guide to Habitat Management](#),  
Herpetological Conservation Trust

[Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook](#),  
Froglife

### Links to relevant BAP's

Ponds and Lodges

Reedbeds

Hedgerows

Wigan BAP

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