

NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

GREAT CRESTED NEWT

(*Triturus cristatus*)

The largest European newt, which typically can grow up to 15cm (6 inches) in length. The male has a splendid orange belly with black spots and a dinosaur-like ridge along its back in the breeding season. It spends the spring and summer in ponds, but at other times inhabits damp terrestrial habitats from wet grassland to cellars!

Ref 1/S10	Tranche 1	Species Action Plan 10
Plan Author:	Norfolk Wildlife Trust	
Plan Co-ordinator:	Norfolk Wildlife Trust	
Plan Leader:	Waterbodies Group	
Date:	Stage:	
31 December 1998	Final Draft	
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1. CURRENT STATUS

National Status

- The British population of great crested newt is among the largest in Europe but has suffered a decline in recent years.
- The great crested newt is listed on Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive, Appendix II of the Bern Convention, and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Norfolk Status

- The newt is locally common/frequent through south and mid Norfolk and Breckland and has suffered a major decline in the Broads.

2. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE IN NORFOLK

- Loss of grazing marsh to arable has been cited as a cause as well as intensive agriculture. The loss of ponds in some study areas is put at over 74% since 1905. While most of this loss is attributed to infilling on farms and to development, natural succession is also an important factor. These factors are still continuing.

3. CURRENT ACTION IN NORFOLK

- Where ponds are known to have newts, attempts are made to protect them from damaging activities. Ponds are being created that benefit newts but the numbers of new ponds are unknown.

4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National

- Restore populations to 100 unoccupied sites each year for next 5 years.
- Maintain range, distribution, and viability of existing populations.

Norfolk

- Maintain range and viability of populations.
- Restore 5 ponds per year for 5 years.

Great Crested Newt - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.1	Policy and Legislation			
5.1.1	Identify all occupied ponds in Local Plan. Protect and enhance in accordance with PPG9.	Identify all occupied ponds in Local Plans. Provide guidance in Norfolk Protected Species Handbook. Compile a directory of sites.	LAs NWT/EN NBRC	
5.1.2	Expand agri-environment incentives for pond creation.	Ensure that available and proposed measures in Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Area schemes benefit the species.	DEFRA (RDS)	
5.1.3	Create new pond protection measures.	Ensure that agencies providing pond grants give appropriate emphasis to the needs of the newt.	LAs	
5.2	Site Safeguard and Management			
5.2.1		Supply all Local Authorities with locations of significant ponds.	NWT/NBRC	
5.2.2	Promote favourable management of all key sites.	Identify key sites. Provide advice on five of these sites per year. Establish demonstration site showing best management practice. Seek to ensure that sites are protected from development. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, seek adequate mitigation through the planning process.	County Recorder NWT, FWAG, LAs, EN LAs/FWAG/ NWT EN/NWT, LPAs	Specific Landowners and Managers Developers

Great Crested Newt - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.2.3	Maintain number and distribution of sites through restoration/creation.	Restore or create at least two sites per year specifically for the species in targetted localities.	LAs, EA, NWT, FWAG	Specific Landowners and Managers
5.3	Species Management and Protection			
5.3.1	Encourage natural dispersal or consider translocation programmes.	Restore or establish two populations per year.	NWT, FWAG, LAs, EN, EA	
5.4	Advisory			
5.4.1	Publish guidance on legal obligations and translocation techniques.	Provide advice on pond and habitat management. See 5.1.1.	NWT/EN	Landowners and Managers
5.4.2	Train surveyors and managers.	County recorder to organise training event to implement national standards of survey and management.	NNNS, NWT, Norfolk Amphibian and Reptile Group	Volunteer Surveyors
5.5	Future Research and Monitoring			
5.5.1	Develop further survey methods and data retrieval.	Implement best survey methods and data retrieval as they become available.	NNNS, NWT/NBRC	
5.5.2	Survey to identify key breeding sites.	Determine key breeding sites, based on current knowledge. Collate existing data.	NNNS, NWT/NBRC NBRC/NWT Norfolk Amphibian and Reptile Group	
5.5.3	Research conservation management to determine favourable conservation status.	Implement best conservation practice as it becomes available. Ensure current practices are adequate.	EN, NWT, LAs, FWAG	
5.5.4	Expand national recording scheme.	Participate in national recording scheme as required.	NNNS, Norfolk Amphibian and Reptile Group	Volunteer Surveyors

Great Crested Newt - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.5.5	Submit survey data to Joint Nature Conservation Committee/Biological Records Centre.	Submit data to Joint Nature Conservation Committee/Biological Records Centre and Norfolk Biological Records Centre. Monitor key sites (see 5.5.2) and identify frequency and surveyor.	NNNS, NBRC NNNS, NWT	Surveyors
5.6	Communications and Publicity			
5.6.1	Develop communication between statutory bodies and conservation groups.	Implement any nationally agreed communication plan.	NWT/EN	
5.6.2	Promote amphibian conservation.	Produce a plan for publicising species and habitat conservation.	EN, Norfolk Amphibian and Reptile Group	The Public, The Media

NORFOLK DISTRIBUTION

Great crested newts are found mainly in central and south-east Norfolk, although there are clusters in north and west Norfolk and a few colonies in Breckland.

Great crested newts are traditionally associated with clusters of ponds in rough grassland. However, they will readily colonise garden ponds, moats, brick pits and even concrete tanks when local populations are strong. Several ponds linked by grassland are essential to maintain a healthy, inter-related population, known as a “metapopulation”.

MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

(This guidance is a general summary; for detailed information or advice consult the references or contacts below.)

Activities which involve the handling or disturbance of newts require a licence from English Nature, but most management work can be carried out without a licence, providing it occurs when newts are least likely to be active.

An ideal pond for great crested newts will include the following favourable aquatic features:

- Still water with a surface area of between 50 and 250m², preferably with several ponds in a group.
- Gently sloping sides for easy access, although the species does occur in some steep-sided ponds. In these cases, a small ramp might help access.
- Shallow areas near the margins to warm up quickly in spring, and deeper areas for protection from frost and to prevent the pond from drying out before the tadpoles have developed.
- Water free from pollution (avoid run-off from roads or arable land), with a neutral to alkaline pH (6+); slight nutrient enrichment can be tolerated.
- A southern edge free from scrub or overhanging branches to allow sunlight onto the pond; this not only warms the water, but encourages aquatic plants. Adult newts enjoy some areas shaded by scrub or trees.
- Aquatic and emergent plants as a refuge and for egg-laying, but some open areas are also required. Favourite plants include water speedwell, water crowfoot, water starwort, float grass, water mint, water forget-me-not, brooklime and watercress.
- Aquatic invertebrates, including water snails, fly larvae, water lice, worms and *Daphnia*, for food.
- A lack of fish, including small species such as sticklebacks and preferably a lack of wildfowl.

Ideal great crested newt habitat should include:

- Uneven grassland, with tussocks and patches of scrub and trees. 1ha of suitable habitat will support approximately 250 newts and less than 0.5ha is unlikely to support a viable colony. If patches of suitable habitat are fragmented or ponds isolated, corridors, such as hedges and grassy strips will help to link them.
- Pond clusters, ideally including temporary or ephemeral ponds, as these will have

fewer predators, such as fish or predatory invertebrates.

- Plenty of shelter, such as logs, piles of stones, tree roots. These provide day time shelter and should be damp, but not waterlogged. Shelter that remains frost-free is vital for hibernation.

Management Tasks

Ponds require occasional management to stall the natural processes of filling with silt and drying out. Where work is required, the following guidelines will minimise disturbance to newts. Although work for newts will benefit most wildlife, disturbance to other species using the pond should also be taken into account:

- Ponds choked by aquatic or marginal vegetation will need to be cleared out. Clearance work is best carried out in the late autumn or winter, when newts are least likely to be active. Only part of the pond should be cleared in any one year. Clearance by hand is preferable where ever possible and debris removed should be left on the bank for a day or so to allow pond creatures to make their way back to the water. For ponds in bad condition, seek expert advice.
- Dredging of ponds might be required if a build up of silt means the pond is in danger of drying up. All pond work is best carried out in autumn, before water levels rise and soils become water logged. Unless the pond is in very bad condition, some silt or vegetation should be left.
- Rubbish dumped in ponds can create pollution as well as being unsightly, however, newts may use some items, such as plastic bags, as shelter, or for egg-laying, so care should be taken when removing them. Leave items being used in place until after the breeding season.
- Fish can be removed by draining the pond in early autumn, but permission from the Environment Agency will be required.
- Avoid using agricultural or garden chemicals in or around the pond.

Management of terrestrial habitats should also take account of the needs of great crested newts. In some cases the grassland may be of interest botanically and care should be taken to avoid damage to wildflowers.

- Great crested newts can be active at any time of the year, other than the very depths of winter, and are most active at night, sheltering in tussocks of grass by day. Both grass and scrub are best cut in autumn or winter, with a high cut recommended for areas of tussocks. A medium length of grass is preferred and newts are unlikely to be on land in May and June.
- Hibernation sites should not be disturbed during the winter.
- Grazing, like mowing, can also control scrub growth and is less likely to damage newts sheltering in the grass. Advice on the most appropriate management of grasslands should be sought, but aim to create an uneven grassland structure and fence off ponds if livestock are likely to damage the margins. Avoid over grazing.
- Scrub clearance or the cutting back of overhanging trees should avoid disturbance to the pond and other species, such as nesting birds. Only cut a few trees in any one year.
- Inert material such as dumped rubble, might be used as a refuge, especially during the

winter. Consider making these eyesores more attractive, but leave them in place if possible, perhaps by sensitive landscaping, or provide alternative shelter elsewhere in the vicinity.

Creating new ponds

Great crested newts will colonise new ponds provided the location and conditions are suitable. Advice on pond construction, including use of liners, should be sought; all contractors should be informed of the law in relation to great crested newts and the construction guidelines below:

- New ponds should be sited in an area that collects water naturally, or near a suitable supply, but damage to existing areas valuable to wildlife should be avoided; wet hollows may contain last remnants of diverse communities of marshland plants.
- Several small ponds, each within 500m of the next, are preferable to one large one, providing they are linked by suitable habitat; a variety of ponds, including temporary, sunny and partially shaded is ideal.
- Woodland edge, scrub or hedgerows within 50m of the pond will provide hibernation sites.
- The amount of public access to the pond should be considered, as disturbance or the introduction of fish will be problematic.
- In gardens the planting of aquatic and emergent vegetation will help the colonisation of new ponds. The list of plants for an 'ideal pond', given above, is a good starting point, but appropriate plants occurring naturally in the vicinity of the new pond may be considered. It is best to avoid introducing plants into new, non-garden, ponds such as on commons, farmland and in villages. Never introduce fish or wildfowl.
- The colonisation of a new pond by invertebrates can be encouraged by using a couple of buckets of water from existing local ponds, or spreading a thin layer of topsoil (one spadeful per 4m²) in the base of the new pond.
- The habitat around the pond should be a mosaic of grass and scrub and can be created by planting scattered scrub, or opening up areas covered with scrub, as required. At least one hectare of suitable habitat should be within 200m of the pond, preferably adjacent to it. Shelters can be created from piles of stones or logs, with some including frost-free ones for hibernation.

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