



Great Crested Newt

Conservation Handbook



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Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook

by Tom Langton, Catherine Beckett and Jim Foster



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Abbreviated names in this text

CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
DEFRA	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
EA	Environment Agency
EN	English Nature
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
NAW	National Assembly for Wales
SE	Scottish Executive
SEERAD	Scottish Executive Environmental Rural Affairs Department
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SNCO	Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation
SNH	Scottish National Heritage



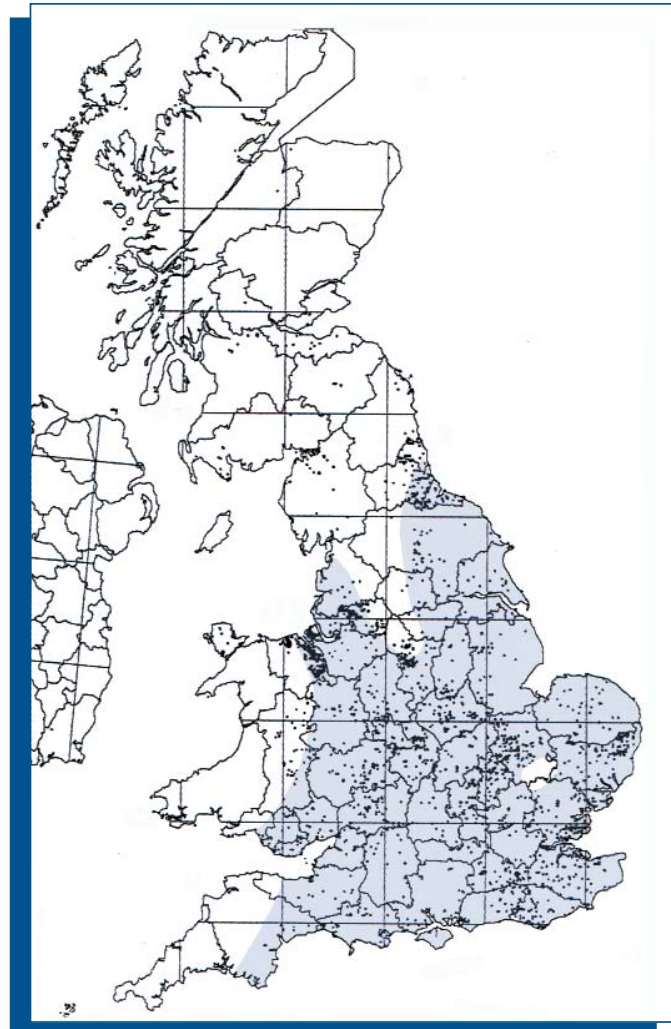
Preface

Great crested newts share a particularly unfortunate history with many other animals in Britain. They declined very markedly during the latter part of the twentieth century, primarily as a result of agricultural intensification. Like the other amphibians, great crested newts need suitable ponds surrounded by good quality terrestrial habitat if they are to prosper. Changes in farming practices have had seriously adverse effects on both of these essential requirements. Ponds have disappeared through a combination of neglect and deliberate destruction. They have become increasingly redundant from the agricultural point of view, reducing the extent (and thus crop yield) of arable fields, and often superfluous to requirements for livestock since the advent of piped water systems. Intensive ploughing, spraying and until recently stubble burning in arable areas has also made the landscape around many ponds increasingly inhospitable to amphibians. All too many of our remaining countryside ponds are almost lifeless, polluted puddles isolated in agricultural prairies.

Great crested newts are rather more fastidious in their habitat requirements than our other widespread amphibian species, and as a result, have declined more severely. Nevertheless, their needs are now quite well known and the possibility to reverse recent declines lies clearly before us. Ponds suitable for great crested newts can be restored and new ones created. Terrestrial habitat between ponds can be managed in newt-friendly ways to strengthen metapopulation structures. The methods for achieving these objectives are tried and tested; we know they can work. New words such as **pondscapes** and **pondways** are entering the conservation vocabulary as we become increasingly aware of the importance of habitat continuity.

The UK's great crested newt Species Action Plan (SAP) sets out how effective conservation can be achieved. Together with an associated Work Programme (WP) these documents should pave the way for a major reversal in the great crested newt's unenviable recent fate. This handbook is intended to supplement the SAP and WP, with the detailed procedures essential for putting them into action on the ground. At last there is cause for optimism that great crested newts are on the way back.

Trevor Beebee
University of Sussex.



Great crested newt breeding sites (dots) and the area (blue) where early 20th century pond numbers exceeded about 1 per square km in the species known range in lowland England and Wales. Map adapted from Oliver Rackham (Ref 72). Great crested newt data from Froglife Great Crested Newt Sites Register (Froglife 1998).



Introduction

The great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* is Britain's most strictly protected amphibian. It is included in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive due to the considerable decline that it underwent during the last century. Like nearly all amphibians, the great crested newt is dependent on water-bodies for breeding but usually spends most of its life on land. Despite a widespread distribution, the status of the great crested newt is considered to be of concern because populations are still being lost or damaged. The main factors in the decline of this species are:

- The deliberate filling in or destruction of ponds
- Pond loss through natural succession
- Introduction of fish
- Chemical pollution and nutrification of breeding sites
- Loss of terrestrial habitat
- Habitat fragmentation
- Habitat management which renders sites unsuitable for great crested newts
- Deterioration of ponds through neglect or misuse



To counter these factors, and therefore to conserve and enhance great crested newt populations, the application of a wide range of measures is necessary.

- **Survey:** It is estimated that only around one sixth of breeding ponds have been identified, and in some geographic areas the knowledge of distributions is very much poorer than this. Further field survey is required to improve this situation.
- **Habitat management:** Favourable habitat management, restoration and creation need to be encouraged by ensuring that clear and concise practical advice is available, and by offering incentives to landowners for co-operation.

- **Formalising newt interest in planning procedures:**

Great crested newts are threatened by a wide range of land uses, including agriculture, forestry and development. The recognition of great crested newt sites by Local Planning Authorities in terms of both development control and strategic planning is vital to protect them from land use threats. In most areas this is still a long way from being put into practice adequately.

- **Implementation of legislation:** The legislation protecting great crested newts is often not interpreted in a way that most benefits conservation, nor is it effectively enforced, so these areas require further attention.

This publication aims to assist those undertaking practical conservation work for the great crested newt. It provides guidance so that the conservation objectives can be achieved most effectively. In particular, it focuses on habitat management and survey to locate great crested newts, with supporting information on ecology, legislation and site protection.

It has been designed to be used primarily by the following groups: volunteer surveyors; wardens, rangers, landowners and others who manage sites; local authority staff involved in protecting sites; statutory nature conservation agencies and voluntary conservation organisations involved with great crested newt sites. Although it cannot be exhaustive, it should provide enough detail to assist many of the practical tasks outlined in the great crested newt Species Action Plan and in the national Work Programme.

This handbook is a guide to proactive conservation, and not mitigation measures such as habitat and newt translocation at sites subject to a change in land use. These cases are likely to require application of expert knowledge specific to each circumstance. The generalised account of great crested newt ecology has been put together using a range of published and unpublished sources, which are listed in the references.