



Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

Species Action Plan

2009-2013

Plan Lead Organisation	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Plan Coordinator	Rachel Jackson
Action Group	Wetland and Coastal
Associated Plans	Ponds, lakes and reservoirs
Latest version	Published March 2009

Description

The great crested newt is our largest newt species, growing up to 16cm in length. It is dark brown or black with a warty roughish skin. Its underside is bright yellow or orange with black spots. In spring and summer the male has a ragged crest along its back and a separate crest along the top of its tail.

As an amphibian, the great crested newt requires suitable aquatic and terrestrial habitats to accommodate its lifecycle. Adult newts arrive in ponds to breed in late winter/early spring. The newts prefer a cluster of relatively large ponds, which are free from fish or ducks and support suitable aquatic or marginal vegetation upon which females lay their eggs. After breeding, adults return to the land, spending late summer and autumn foraging for small invertebrates in the surrounding landscape.

Eggs are laid between March and June, and hatch after about three weeks. The larvae have fine external gills, and spend approximately three months in mid-water, feeding on small invertebrates and other newt larvae. After this time, when metamorphosis is complete and breathing function shifts to the lungs, the juvenile terrestrial newts leave the pond. Most leave by late summer, although some remain to overwinter in the pond. Both adults and juveniles hibernate from mid-October to mid-February, with juveniles reaching sexual maturity after two to three years. Hedgerows, scrub, and mature wooded areas are required for hibernation, as well as rough grassland for foraging.

Britain is an important stronghold for the species in Europe. It is widely distributed in England and most common in southeast England. The great crested newt is more fastidious in its habitat requirements than the more common smooth newt and as a result has suffered a greater decline. Studies in the 1980s indicate a national rate of colony loss of approximately 2% over five years. There is a need for further survey work as conservation charity, Froglife, estimate that nationally only about one sixth of breeding ponds have been identified. We now have a greater understanding of the ecological requirements of great crested newts as to how to manage and create suitable habitats to support viable meta-populations.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ Loss and isolation of suitable breeding ponds, caused by infilling of ponds for agricultural intensification, urban developments and loss through natural succession.
- ◆ Degradation of breeding ponds due to introduction of fish, pollution, eutrophication, inappropriate management or lack thereof.
- ◆ Loss and fragmentation of terrestrial habitats, removing foraging and hibernation sites and creating barriers to dispersal.

Conservation Status

EC Habitats Directive, Annexes II and IV
Bern Convention, Appendix II
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 5

The Species in the Tees Valley

Great crested newts are widely distributed across most of the Tees Valley but there are no current, confirmed records from Middlesbrough (apart from an historical record in Thornton) and few from around the lower Tees Estuary. As much of the land in the lower Tees Estuary is reclaimed, it is possible that great crested newts were never present in these areas.

Historical records show great crested newt activity most associated with i) farm ponds - especially where there are clusters of ponds scattered through an area and ii) industrial ponds such as former brick pits south of Normanby and ironstone mining subsidence ponds north of Guisborough. Declining management of farm ponds (because they don't have any agricultural or economic function) and reclamation or landfill of industrial ponds has led to Tees Valley declines.

There remain healthy populations around the Eaglescliffe and Cowpen Bewley area and also Carlin Howe, but otherwise populations seem to be small and fragmented. A number of populations would seem to have been lost due to the loss of breeding ponds but even more critically, many populations may be too small to be viable in the long term without enhancement of breeding ponds and surrounding terrestrial habitats.

Great crested newts typically breed in ponds that are fairly large and deep and in general garden ponds don't offer the same scale or pond clusters. However they can maintain reasonable populations in garden ponds and further research is needed to the extent to which this is occurring in the Tees Valley, perhaps with particular emphasis on areas where historic breeding ponds have been lost.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

The North East Reptile and Amphibian Group maintains a data base of amphibians and reptiles in the Tees Valley which is regularly updated. In 2007 the Tees Valley Biodiversity partnership carried out a public survey of amphibians in the Tees Valley. The results of this survey have been incorporated into the Tees Valley dataset.

The Tees Valley Wildlife Trust is delivering a Newts Project funded by SITA (2007 -2009). The project seeks to reverse a decline in amphibian (especially, but not exclusively great crested newt) breeding ponds in the Tees Valley and to provide baseline population information and favourable habitat at five key sites across the area. These are Bowesfield Nature Reserve, Portrack Marsh, Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park, Wynyard Woodland Park and Flatts Lane Country Park. These are considered to provide "meta-populations" for amphibians with a total of 21 ponds found at the five locations. This has involved survey work, pond creation and restoration work.

Further Information

Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth.

Websites

Herpetological Conservation Trust

www.herpconstrust.org.uk

Froglife

www.froglife.org

National amphibian and reptile recording scheme

www.narrs.org.uk

Vision Statement

To ensure viable great crested newt metapopulations in the Tees Valley by managing pond clusters to provide suitable breeding ponds and associated terrestrial habitat.

Targets

GCN.T1 To increase the breeding populations of great crested newts at meta-population sites in the Tees Valley .

Goal: To increase the number of ponds with potential for breeding populations of great crested newt.

Note: A quantitative figure for this goal will be added in 2009. This will be based on the current data for ponds with recorded great crested newts that is currently being digitized by the Tees Valley Pondscape Project, so that meta-populations can be identified

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
GCN. A1	Digitise and express graphically by GIS all existing amphibian data through Tees Valley Pondscape Project.	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Jessica Harrison		April 2009
GCN. A2	Identify pond clusters that are currently supporting or have potential to support meta-populations of great crested newt.	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson		April 2009
GCN. A3	Monitor known populations of great crested newts	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson		Ongoing
GCN. A4	Prioritise areas for species survey and habitat suitability	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson	HCT	2009
GCN. A5	Implement surveys for species and habitat suitability identified in action 4.	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson	HCT	2011
GCN. A6	Strengthen and expand known meta-populations by carrying out pond creation and management work through the Tees Valley Pondscape Project.	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson		2011
GCN. A7	Organise amphibian survey training and coordinate volunteers in carrying out targeted surveys through Tees Valley Pondscape Project and NERAG.	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Rachel Jackson	NERAG, HCT	2009
GCN. A8	Complete monitoring of ponds maintained and created through the SITA Tees Valley Newts Project.	TVWT	Jeremy Garside		2009
GCN. A9	Maintain Tees Valley amphibian database by updating annually.	NERAG	Terry Douthwaite	All partners	Ongoing
GCN. A10	Increase the number of events in the Tees Valley carried out by the reptile and Amphibian Group (NERAG).	NERAG	Naomi Hewitt	Pondscape Project	Ongoing
GCN. A11	Increase awareness amongst general public and landowners of the threats of fish to great crested newt and pond biodiversity.	Environment Agency	Fiona Morris	Pondscape Project (TVBP)	Ongoing
GCN. A12	Use section 30 licenses to ensure compliance with Environment Agency policy to prevent to prevent impact on great crested newt as a result of fish stocking.	Environment Agency	Fiona Morris		Ongoing
GCN. A13	Local authorities to inform landowners of location of great crested newts on their property to comply with section 25 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.	TVBP	Sue Antrobus	Hartlepool BC, Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Middlesbrough BC	June 2009 and ongoing
GCN. A14	Ensure data on great crested newts obtained from the Environment Statements of planning applications is used to update the Tees Valley Inventory .	Hartlepool Borough Council	Ian Bond	Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Middlesbrough BC	Ongoing