

GREAT CRESTED NEWT

Triturus cristatus

Great Crested Newts and their breeding and foraging habitats are protected by UK and European legislation. The greatest threat to Great Crested Newts in Cumbria is destruction of their ponds and surrounding terrestrial habitat.

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Great Crested Newt © Jim Foster/Natural England

Legal and Conservation Status

- Annex IV Habitats Directive (European Protected Species)
- Annex II Habitats Directive (protection through Special Areas of Conservation)
- UK Protected Species
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species and Species of Principal Importance in England
- Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan species

The Great Crested Newt is protected under:

- Regulation 39 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 (as amended) (Schedule 2) as European Protected Species ¹.
- Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (Schedule 5) ².

It is an offence to:

- Intentionally ² or deliberately ¹ capture, injure or kill a Great Crested Newt.
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place of a Great Crested Newt ¹, or intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy any structure or place used for shelter or protection ².
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a Great Crested Newt in a place used for shelter or protection ², or deliberately disturb Great Crested Newts in such a way as to be likely significantly to affect (i) the ability of any significant group to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young, or (ii) the local distribution or abundance ¹.
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection ².
- Possess a Great Crested Newt (alive or dead), or any part of a Great Crested Newt ².

(This summarizes the main points of the law.)

Habitat

Great Crested Newts need ponds for breeding, and terrestrial habitats, generally within 500m of their breeding ponds, for foraging and hibernation. The majority of time is spent on land.

The best breeding ponds are unpolluted and of medium size (500-750m²). Isolated populations can occur using a single pond, but to ensure continued viability a population requires a high density of ponds (at least three per km²) which should be interconnected by suitable habitat, such as hedgerows with associated corridors of rough grassland. Creation of new ponds, and linking of ponds, are therefore important active conservation measures.

Great Crested Newts rarely survive in ponds where fish are present because the fish eat the newt larvae. Ponds that dry out in some years can therefore be excellent for Great Crested Newts because fish cannot survive in them.

It is estimated that 250 adult newts need at least a hectare of suitable terrestrial habitat adjacent to their breeding pond. This should consist of a mosaic of woodland, scrub and rough grassland. Stone quarries, even when mostly bare rock and spoil, can, surprisingly, provide good habitat for Great Crested Newts.

Cumbria Key Habitats that are particularly important for Great Crested Newts include:

Hedgerows

Heathland

Bogs

Lakes, Ponds and Tarns

Ecology

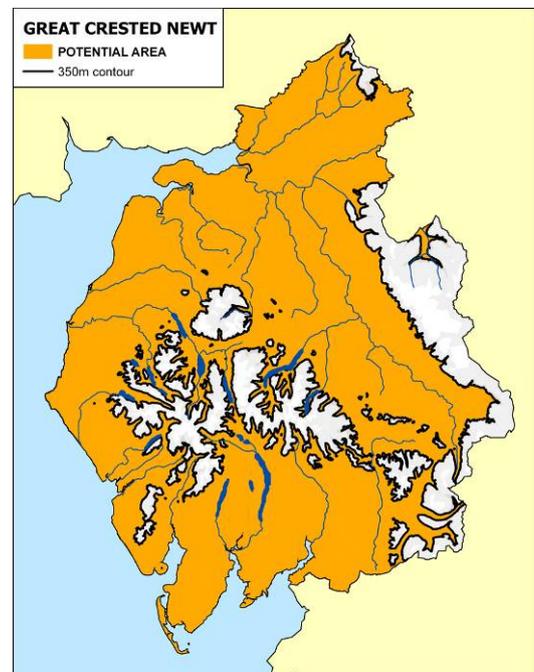
In the winter Great Crested Newts hibernate in frost free holes in the ground and under stones. The breeding adults return to their breeding pond in the spring to court, mate and lay eggs. These are laid singly in the folded leaves of water plants and hatch into legless larvae. The adults can usually be found in their breeding ponds between mid-March and mid-June. This is the time when they are easiest to find.

The larvae develop for about three months into young newts which then leave the water. These young newts generally stay away from their birth pond for up to three years until sexually mature. Great Crested Newts can live for up to 18 years in the wild, and spend the majority of their life cycle on land.

They cannot co-exist with carnivorous fish species which predate the newt larvae.

Distribution

The UK is a major stronghold for this species in the European context, where it is still widespread. It has, however, suffered a decline in recent years, with studies in the 1980s indicating a national rate of colony loss of about 2% every five years.



Surveys in recent years suggest that the Great Crested Newt is scattered throughout Cumbria below about 350m, and it is possible that newts will be found anywhere in the low lying areas of Cumbria. The current distribution is probably under-estimated as detailed surveys undertaken for potential developments each year find a high incidence of Great Crested Newts in surveyed ponds, whether newts were known to be present or not.

Great Crested Newts can be found in a variety of habitats including fell tarns, farmland and garden ponds, quarry pools and brownfield sites.

Conservation Issues

The loss of ponds through neglect, in-filling and development has reduced the number of potential Great Crested Newt breeding sites. Fragmentation of terrestrial habitats is making it harder for newts to move between ponds, and when populations become extinct the ponds cannot easily be re-colonised. Stocking of ponds with fish is normally detrimental to Great Crested Newts. The presence of domestic wildfowl reduces pond suitability through nutrient enrichment of water and vegetation damage. The general lowering of ground water levels in urban, industrial and intensive agriculture areas causes ponds to dry out. Pollution, such as run-off of agricultural chemicals, degrades Great Crested Newt habitat.

Planning Considerations

- Part IV of ODPM Circular 06/2005: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation sets out the wide range of legislative provisions for conservation of species protected by national and international law. It emphasizes the need for ecological surveys to establish the presence of protected species and for protection measures to be in place through conditions and/or planning obligations before planning permission is granted. It also advises that local authorities should consult Natural England before the planning decision is made.
- Great Crested Newts have been found throughout Cumbria, including some unlikely-looking places such as working quarries.
- Any proposed development that may affect a Great Crested Newt pond or its terrestrial habitat requires a Great Crested Newt survey; as a guide any proposed development within 0.5km of a pond has the potential to impact upon their activity.
- Consideration must be given to the maintenance and provision of habitat corridors that are used for foraging or dispersal between ponds, and as terrestrial habitat.
- Surveys for Great Crested Newts cannot be carried out adequately during the autumn and winter months. This may mean that decisions have to be delayed until after a suitable survey window.
- Any development that would impact on Great Crested Newts and their breeding and resting places and/or significant habitat would require adequate protection and mitigation measures, and the developer would require a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence, under the Habitats Regulations 1994, to proceed.

Enhancement Opportunities

- Incorporation of wildlife ponds, including suitable adjoining terrestrial habitat, into new developments, even if Great Crested Newts are not affected by the development. Where they are affected mitigation measures should include recreation of ponds on a two for one basis.
- Creation of 'networks' of ponds linked by suitable terrestrial habitat.
- Creation/enhancement of refuges/over-wintering sites within existing as well as new habitat.

Further Information

[Natural England Wildlife Management & Licensing Service](#)

[European Protected Species: Mitigation Licensing - How to get a licence](#), Natural England 2009

[Disturbance and protected species: understanding and applying the law in England and Wales](#)

[Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines](#), English Nature 2001

[Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook](#), Froglife 2001

[Special Area of Conservation \(SAC\) Species Account](#), JNCC

[The Conservation of Great Crested Newts – A brief guide to habitat management](#), 2002

[Herpetofauna Workers Manual](#)

[Amphibians in your garden](#), Natural England

[UK Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

[Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

Contacts

- **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation**, 655A Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 4AP. Tel: 01202 391319, website: www.arc-trust.org
- **Natural England**, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Rd, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL, Tel: 0300 060 2122, cumbriaplanning@naturalengland.org.uk.
- **Cumbria Amphibian and Reptile Group (CARG)**, Sam Griffin Tel: 016973 23939

Current Action in Cumbria

- The Cumbria Amphibian and Reptile Group monitors Great Crested Newt populations and seeks to improve public understanding through events.