

## Great crested newts (GCN)

### Ecology

The great crested newt is Britain's largest newt species, measuring up to 16cm long. They are dark in colour with warty skin, and males have a prominent jagged crest during the breeding season and a white flash on the tail. While these rare amphibians are most often associated with ponds, great crested newts actually spend most of the year in terrestrial habitats, living to five or six years old.

In early spring, great crested newts migrate to breeding ponds, using the pond margins for nocturnal courtship and egg-laying. Males perform an elaborate courtship dance to entice females into breeding with them, after which, the females lay fertilised eggs singly on submerged plant leaves.

GCN leave their breeding ponds in the summer, but stay within 250m foraging on invertebrates such as worms, beetles, spiders and slugs. They are also known to have taken tadpoles and even other species of newts. This behaviour extends into autumn in preparation for the coming winter.

In winter, great crested newts spend most of their time sheltering from the adverse weather. They hibernate underground, amongst tree roots, or under rocks, but sometimes take advantage of the milder weather to forage and top up their energy supply.

### Habitat and distribution

Although great crested newts are widespread in the UK, their distribution can be described as patchy, with good populations in lowland areas with large numbers of ponds, such as Cheshire and Shropshire. While they can be found across Europe, significant declines have resulted in the British populations of great crested newts becoming internationally important.

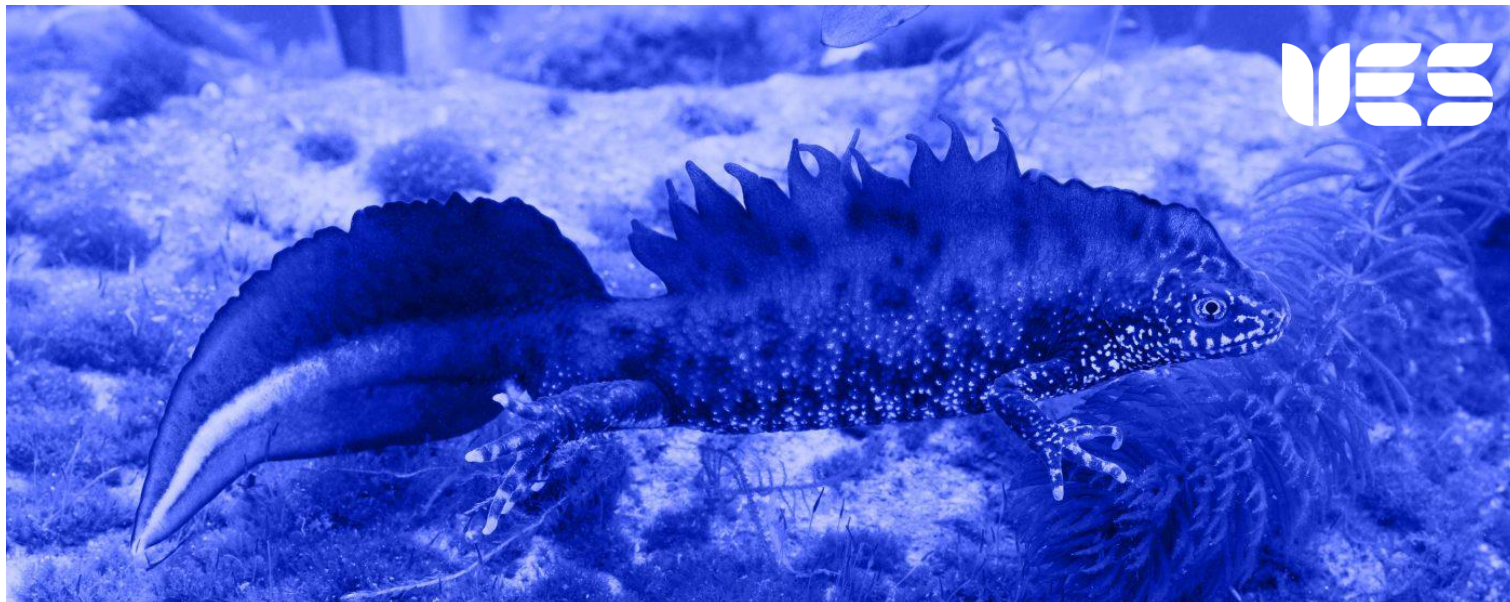
Many factors affect the suitability of a pond to support breeding great crested newts, such as size, location, shading, water quality and the presence of fish or water fowl. Surrounding terrestrial habitats, such as scrub, woodland, hedgerows and rough grassland, offer sheltered foraging opportunities and refuges.

### Why are GCN protected?

The loss of ponds throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the biggest contributor to the declines in great crested newt populations across Europe. Simultaneously, agricultural expansion and intensification have rendered many terrestrial habitats unsuitable for foraging and commuting newts.

### The law

Great crested newts and their habitat (aquatic and terrestrial) are afforded full protection by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.



You may commit a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture GCN
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb GCN in such a way to be likely to significantly affect:
  - their ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture their young
  - their ability to hibernate or migrate
  - their local distribution or abundance
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly take or destroy the eggs of GCN
- Damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places of GCN
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb sheltering GCN, or obstruct access to their resting place
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange any live or dead GCN, any part of GCN or anything derived from GCN

Penalties for offences include fines of up to £5000, plus up to six months imprisonment, for each offence committed.

Local Planning Authorities will often ask for a great crested newt survey to be undertaken as part of planning if the proposed development has the potential to impact on GCN or their habitats. It should be noted that developments that are not subject to planning permission are still subject to the above legislation.