

Great Crested Newt

Introduction

The Great Crested Newt is one of six amphibians in Britain and the largest newt, growing up to 16cm long. It has held a fascination to children and adults alike through the ages. Many people will have fond memories of catching newts. Although dependent on ponds for breeding, adult newts spend much of the year on land. High quality foraging areas, especially pasture, and hibernation sites are essential. Adults usually remain within 500m of their breeding site, although juveniles can range widely.

Although the species has experienced a decline in recent years, Britain still supports one of the largest populations in Europe, where it is

Our objective for Great Crested Newts is:

To contribute to the UK BAP by maintaining Scarborough District as a key area for Great Crested Newt population.

Links to Habitat Action Plans and Guidance Notes.

Priority habitats associated with Great Crested Newts:

Neutral grassland, Open water, Coastal cliff mosaics

Action Plans have been prepared for those in bold.

threatened in several countries. In suitable conditions, populations can increase quickly.

Scarborough has a healthy population of Great Crested Newts and therefore has an international responsibility to conserve this species. In order for Scarborough Borough to continue to hold an internationally important population of Great Crested Newts the following are required:

- Suitable breeding ponds;
- Adjacent high quality foraging ground; and
- Hibernation sites, such as earthworks, scrub, hedges and tussocks.

It is a UK BAP priority species and is protected by:

- Annexes 2 and 5 of the EC Habitats Directive;
- Appendix 3 of the Bern Convention (Conservation of

- European Wildlife and Natural Habitats); and
- Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Great Crested Newts may not be handled or their territory disturbed without a licence issued by English Nature (EN).

Status and Distribution

National Status - The Great Crested Newt is widespread in Britain. It has been estimated that there are around 18,000 ponds in Britain supporting populations of the animal, but only 3,000 sites have been confirmed. In Lowland England and Wales the species may be locally numerous, but it is absent from Devon and Cornwall and from Northern Ireland. It is local in Scotland. The species is declining and the annual loss of colonies has been put at 0.4 to 2%. Assuming 18,000 populations, then between 72 and 360 populations are being lost each year.

Regional Status - Locally common, especially in the Vale of York and Vale of Pickering, where there is a good supply of ponds.

Local Status - Locally common. Large populations are regularly found during survey work prior to developments. Over 1,800 adults removed from a housing development site adjacent to Filey Dams Nature Reserve in 2003. Large populations were found on the former Butlins Holiday Camp site at Amtree Park, Filey but illegal activities may have reduced this. Other locations include Muston, Cloughton, Hunmanby, Snainton, Scarborough and Whitby.

Threats

Whilst the Great Crested Newt does not appear to have significantly declined within the Scarborough District and is actually widespread, losses have occurred and it is still vulnerable to the following:

- Loss of habitat;
- Disturbance;
- Unlawful killing;
- Predation by cats;
- Inappropriate habitat management;
- Collection by children; and
- Development.

This is highlighted by the decline in populations at Burton Riggs and Amtree Park. At Burton Riggs a combination of adjacent development and the introduction of fish to the smaller pools has almost eliminated it from the site. At Amtree Park, the illegal clearance of the area without taking proper account of amphibians, has caused a significant reduction in the populations that used to be present.

Current Action

Currently in Scarborough the issue of protecting newts and their habitats is being taken very seriously and surveys for newts and mitigation plans are requested for all planning applications where newts are likely to be found.

Scarborough Borough Council has shown the importance of the protection of this species by taking action against individuals known to have destroyed or damaged newt populations and habitats. A developer was recently found guilty of such an act in the Magistrates Court and received a large fine and criminal record.

English Nature advise on planning applications which may affect Great Crested Newt populations. EN advise developers on the surveys and mitigation that are needed to maintain the population of this European protected species at favourable conservation status.



Great Crested Newt:
(Photograph by James Mortimer)

What you can do to help:

Don't collect Great Crested Newts.

Create a fish-free pond.

Report all sightings to NEYEDC or Scarborough Borough Council.