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Great Crested Newt Surveys

Great crested newts, sometimes abbreviated to GCN, are a European Protected Species, making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, handle or capture a great crested newt. It is also illegal to damage, destroy or obstruct any place a great crested newt uses for breeding purposes or shelter, including aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

What kind of survey do I need?

Surveys for great crested newts are completed when proposed works may damage or destroy ponds, or land near a pond, that has the potential to support great crested newts, which is usually identified during a [Preliminary Ecological Appraisal \(PEA\)](#), scoping or walkover survey. Ponds within a 500 m radius of the site are usually assessed for their suitability to support great crested newts (the accepted migration distance of a GCN). An initial assessment usually includes a visual survey of the pond(s) to determine its suitability to support great crested newts (the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) tool is applied) and also an assessment of terrestrial habitat, which includes searching under refugia for newts. If the pond is deemed suitable for great crested newts, further survey effort may be required, as detailed below.

What does a Great Crested Newt survey involve?

Aquatic (pond) surveys

To determine the presence of great crested newts in a pond, a total of four survey visits are undertaken between mid-March and mid-June, with half of the surveys occurring between the optimum period of mid-April to mid-May (presence/ likely absence survey). Several survey techniques are used: torch light surveys involves the use of a high powered beam to see newts within the pond at night; bottle trapping involves distributing traps within the pond on an evening that are collected the following morning; and finally, egg searching is used to carefully search through aquatic vegetation to check for newt eggs, indicating breeding. Our team holds class licences to permit these activities, which should only be conducted by licenced and experienced ecologists.

A relatively new and innovative technique to confirm the presence or likely absence of great crested newts within a pond is eDNA sampling. This involves obtaining water samples using a standardised methodology, which is then sent to a laboratory for analysis and will confirm if great crested newt DNA has been recorded within the samples (therefore confirming presence in the pond). Providing the sample is obtained within the period 15th April to 30th June, Natural England accept this technique in lieu of the conventional four survey visits to confirm presence/ likely absence. Please feel free to get in contact to discuss eDNA sampling and if this may be useful for your site.

If great crested newts are recorded in the pond, an additional two surveys are completed in order to meet the minimum of six survey visits required for a 'population size class' assessment, as per current Natural England guidelines. This survey effort is suitable for a European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence application (information below).

Terrestrial habitat surveys

Surveys of terrestrial habitat can take place between March and October, and involve searching areas of land that are considered to be of value for great crested newts that may be impacted by a development. This survey technique is less reliable than pond surveys and usually undertaken to supplement the pond activity surveys.

For further information on great crested newt surveys, please [click here](#) to view Natural England's guidance.

Great crested newts nearby – the next steps

If the development will impact upon a great crested newt pond or habitats used by great crested newts, a European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence will be required. An EPS licence application is usually

prepared by an ecologist and includes a Method Statement, which demonstrates how the proposed works will be conducted to avoid harm to great crested newts (mitigation). The EPS licence will also summarise any compensation measures that are required in order to maintain the current habitat value for great crested newts (both aquatic and terrestrial). Our team has completed numerous great crested newt EPS licences and are well experienced in licensing requirements. Please feel free to get in contact to discuss further, we are happy to provide free advice and guidance..

Useful Links

- [Great crested newts: surveys and mitigation for development projects, Natural England](#)
- [Great crested newts: protection and licences, Natural England](#)
- [Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK \(ARG UK\) website \(Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. \(2001\), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth\)](#)