

Great crested newt

5.4 Great crested newt ecology

What are they and how are they recognised?

Newts are amphibians – they can live both in water and on land. Adult great crested newts (GCN) are 110-170 mm long (about twice as big as other newts) and are black or dark brown. During spring and summer, males have a jagged crest along the back and the tail has a silver stripe along it. The females do not have the crest or silver tail stripe but have a bright orange stripe along the bottom of their tail. Both males and females have bright orange bellies with black spots.

Where are they found?

GCN occur in rural, urban and suburban sites. GCN usually prefer medium to large ponds in which to breed but can be found in any body of water on site including temporary pools. GCN spend most of their time on land – they can be found in grass, scrub and woodland and under logs and stones within 250 m to 500 m of the breeding pond.

When are they found?

GCN are nocturnal. They are found in ponds between March and June but can be found on land at any time of year.

What else may be seen?

If GCN are found in a pond, common and/or palmate newts may also be found. Common and palmate newts do not receive the same protection as GCN except in Northern Ireland where the common newt is fully protected. Adults of the species are about the same size as young GCN but are a lighter colour



5.5 Why are great crested newts protected?

Great crested newts are listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention and on Annexes II and IV of the EU Natural Habitats Directive. In England and Wales, the great crested newt is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The legislation covers all newt life stages from eggs to adult newts, which are all equally protected.

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What is an offence?

It is illegal offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately capture, kill, or injure GCN;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy, and disturb GCN in a place used for shelter or protection, or obstruct access to such areas;
- Damage or destroy a GCN breeding site or resting place;
- Possess a GCN, or any part of it, unless acquired lawfully; and
- Sell, barter, exchange, transport, or offer for sale GCN or parts of them.

Activities that can harm great crested newts

- Destruction of breeding ponds
- Ground disturbance near breeding ponds
- Disturbance of vegetation near breeding ponds
- Disturbance of hibernacula (i.e. natural or artificial refuges) used by GCN

What should be done if a GCN is found?

GCN are fully protected against killing, capture, injury and disturbance, and the places they use for shelter or protection are protected against damage, destruction or obstruction.

If a GCN (adult, juvenile or tadpole) is found (or suspected) on site after works have started, and no Natural England licence for impacting works has been granted, all works in the area must stop immediately and expert advice must be sought.

Breaking the law can result in unlimited fines and/or imprisonment. Any vehicles used to commit the offence may be held liable.



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