

# Great crested newts

## Ecology

Great crested newts are widely distributed within the UK, occurring within landscapes which provide suitable aquatic habitat and areas of grassland, woodland and scrub. They are primarily active from late February to October inclusive, coming to water bodies to breed in spring and spending the winter hibernating within terrestrial habitats or occasionally remaining within breeding ponds. They are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (European protected species) and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).



## Survey effort required

To ensure that the Local Planning Authority and the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation can successfully determine either a planning application or a licence application it is important that sufficient survey data is gathered. In the UK, surveys typically follow the standards set within Natural England's Great Crested Newt Mitigation guideline's (English Nature 2001) as well as additional guidance published by the UK Government <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/great-crested-newts-surveys-and-mitigation-for-development-projects>. The survey methods available are summarised below. Deviation from these guidelines needs to be fully justified and could lead to the refusal of planning permission or a licence application.

**Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment-** A HSI assessment is a method by which the suitability of a pond to support great crested newts is calculated based on 10 key features, which include the size of the waterbody, the level of vegetation present etc. HSI assessments are best undertaken in spring when key features such as vegetation cover are easier to determine. However, an ecologist can use their professional judgement to determine likely extent of vegetation etc outside of this period.

**Environmental DNA (Edna)-** Water samples can be collected from a waterbody and sent for laboratory analysis to detect the presence of trace amounts of great crested newt DNA within the sample. Water samples can only be collected by licenced surveyors and can only be collected from the **15<sup>th</sup> April to the 30<sup>th</sup> June** for absence to be proved. Samples collected outside of this period can only be used to prove presence, should great crested newt DNA be recorded.



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**Presence/ absence surveys** -Presence/ absence surveys for great crested newts can only be undertaken during mid - **March to mid-June** with at least half of the required four survey visits completed during **mid-April to mid-May**. Surveys must incorporate three survey methods per visit, which are typically egg searches, torching surveys and bottle trap surveys, with works undertaken during the evening and the following morning. Net searches can also be undertaken in lieu of one of the other survey methods.

**Population assessment surveys**- Where presence is confirmed then an additional two surveys, incorporating the methods as described previously, are required to determine the population size present. This means that six surveys are needed in total, with at least half of these surveys completed during **mid-April to mid-May**. On completion of the surveys the populations size is classified as being either small, medium or large which is then used to assess the level of mitigation which would be required and provide the relevant information for any mitigation licence applications.



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