

## Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)



*Great crested newt male in breeding condition*  
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The great crested newt is the largest British newt and, in the breeding season, the male is recognisable by his jagged crest and silvery-blue stripe down the centre of the tail. Both sexes have a dark brown warty body and yellowish-orange belly with black blotches.

This species is widespread in Europe but is threatened in many countries. Britain has probably Europe's largest population and is, therefore, very important to the continuing survival of the great crested newt.

Newts need waterbodies for breeding but, for most of the year, they live on dry land.

A typical breeding site contains a number of medium to large ponds that have some areas of clear, base-rich water, deeper than 30 cm and with few fish predators.

Such pools are usually surrounded by terrestrial habitat with plentiful ground cover (e.g. scrub, trees, long grass) with moist refuges in which newts spend the daytime (e.g. log piles, rocks or other debris).

**Main Habitat(s):** Farm ponds; mineral workings; temporary pools; ditches; scrub; hedgerows; arable field and pasture; marsh; gardens; sand dunes.

### **National Status**

The great crested newt is widespread in South East and North West England but rarer in the South West, Scotland and Wales. It is absent from Ireland.

Numbers are believed to have declined since the 1940s. Studies in the 1980s estimated the current national rate of colony loss at 2% every five years. Approximately 3,000 colonies have

been identified but it is estimated that there are still about 18,000 colonies in the whole of Britain.

The great crested newt is a European Protected Species by virtue of being listed under Annex IVa to the EU Habitats and Species Directive 1992. It is protected under UK law by the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations, which translates the Habitats Directive into UK legislation, and also under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is also a UK BAP Priority Species.

### **Regional Status**

The North West of England is a stronghold for this species in Britain as a whole. An audit of 487 ponds carried out in the North West in 1995/6 found the species in 26% of ponds.

There are good populations in the Greater Manchester area, the outskirts of Liverpool and the coastal plain of Lancashire, including the Fylde, though there has been a notable loss of sites adjacent to urban areas. There are also numerous breeding sites in Cheshire and scattered populations in Cumbria.

The great crested newt is promoted by English Nature as a 'Regional Biodiversity Indicator' for sustainable development in the North West.

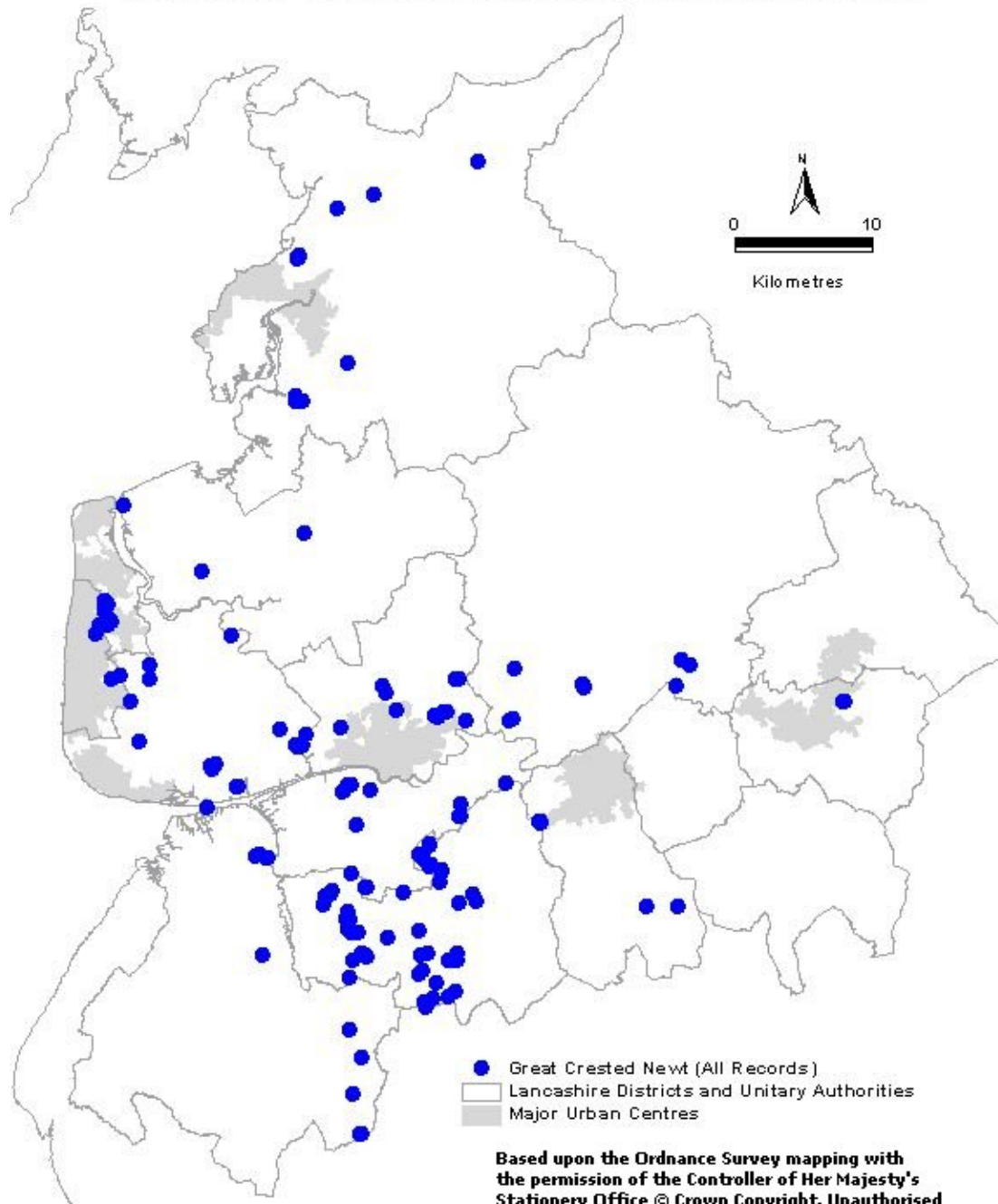
### **Local Status**

The landscape of lowland western Lancashire contains nationally significant densities of ponds. The majority of these are former marl pits from which base-rich clay was extracted to be spread upon farmland. The high pond density makes this part of the county the most important in Lancashire for this species.

Significant populations occur in the Boroughs/Districts of Preston, South Ribble, Chorley and West Lancashire. The newts' breeding ponds in these areas form part of the so-called 'Wigan pondway' which links the pond clusters in the Fylde and Cheshire. Populations associated with the pondway are the most frequently affected by development as they occur within the M6 'development corridor' of Lancashire.

Map(s):

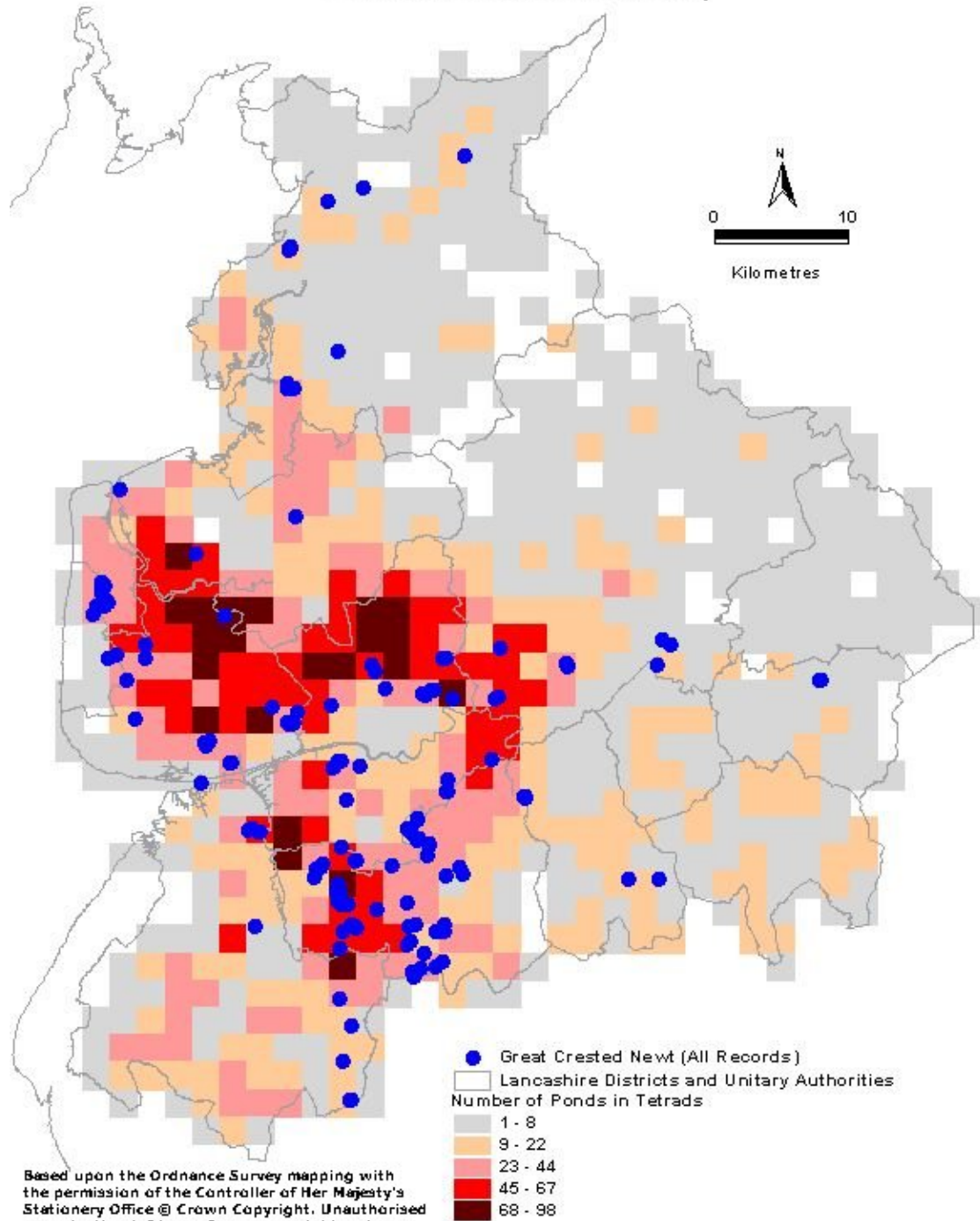
Records of Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*)



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**Lancashire County Council 100023320 2007**

## Records of Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*) in Relation to Pond Density



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## **Current factors affecting the species**

The number of potential breeding ponds for great crested newts is diminishing in western Lancashire. Ponds are no longer as crucial for stock, so there has been no incentive to maintain them. Choking with vegetation removes the open water which the males require for display. Ponds have also been filled in to provide land for development or for agriculture.

Other factors, alone or in combination, can also reduce the number of ponds able to support breeding populations of great crested newts:

- Natural colonisation by, or deliberate/accidental introduction of fish;
- Pollution, acidification and eutrophication of ponds from road, urban and farm run-off;
- Reductions in the water table due to abstraction and/or land drainage;
- The modification of some seasonal ponds to make them permanent encourages the establishment of fish and other predators;
- High newt mortality where roads pass close to breeding ponds.

Newts need 'pondways' (corridors of land that are rich in ponds) to allow individuals to move between areas. Pondways prevent newt populations becoming genetically isolated. The factors described above may reduce the number of suitable ponds and restrict the movement of newts. This can lead to inbreeding and to the extinction of populations even where some suitable ponds still exist.

New ponds are not being created at a rate to compensate for the loss of breeding sites. This is because the agricultural use of marl has more or less ceased so there are virtually no new pits being dug

Great crested newts also require an area of 'good' terrestrial habitat surrounding a pond to a radius of at least 250 m. Development and afforestation can destroy this habitat and lead to the demise of a population although the breeding pond may be preserved intact. Increased grazing pressure and conversion of hay-meadows to silage production may reduce the quality of the terrestrial habitat and affect the ability of a site to support breeding.

Linear habitat features (e.g. hedgerows) are also important for great crested newts as they provide conduits for newt movement. Loss of hedgerows is a factor likely to have an adverse impact upon great crested newt populations.

## **Current Action / Mechanisms**

There is a UK Species Action Plan for the species. As well as safeguarding existing breeding sites, it proposes action to off-set the loss of colonies by creating new populations at 100 presently unoccupied sites per year for five years.

At the regional level, the Pondlife Project, which ran until 1999, was very active in promoting the conservation of ponds in the North West. Its Critical Pond Biodiversity Surveys, for example, highlighted many great crested newt ponds in the region. Despite this, the current distribution of the species in many parts of the county is poorly known.

Amphibian and reptile groups have been established in some parts of the region such as Cheshire and Bolton. A Lancashire Wildlife Trust Newt Group was established in the early 1990s but appears to be no longer active in Lancashire.

Agri-environment schemes may offer incentives to manage existing ponds and to create new habitats. The current trend for "wilder" gardens perhaps also provides an opportunity to increase the amount of good quality habitat available.

The introduction of fish to ponds requires the consent (S30) of the Environment Agency under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act (1975). New fish introductions are screened for impacts upon biodiversity (including threats to protected species).

### Objectives, targets and proposed actions for great crested newt in Lancashire

<b>Broad Objective:</b>	<b>A. Identify all existing breeding sites and assess the population status by 2005.</b>			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Co-ordinate initiatives in Lancashire with other newt conservation schemes.	1. Establish a group to monitor implementation of this plan and to liaise with amphibian conservation bodies throughout the North West. (High)	WT, NG, WWT, EN	S	PR
2. Review existing database and, where deficient, organise surveys to establish all breeding sites by 2003.	1. Review any existing databases and identify gaps in data by 2001. (High)	WT, NG, EN, LCC	S	RM
	2. Commission survey work in 2002 to verify continued occupation of sites on database. (High)	EN	S	RM
	3. If necessary, commission survey work from 2002 -2005 to fill gaps in coverage. (High)	EN	M	RM
3. Monitor breeding ponds to allow reassessment to be made of the local status of the great crested newt in 2005.	1. Organise events aimed at training in monitoring methods for professional & volunteer surveyors and the managers of great crested newt sites. (Medium)	WT, NG, EN	M	RM
	2. Establish a network of surveyors to monitor enough sites to allow a rigorous assessment of newt status in 2005. (Medium)	WT, NG, EN	M	RM
<b>Broad</b>	<b>B. Maintain the range, distribution and viability of existing populations.</b>			

Objective:				
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Protect sites from adverse impacts of development	1. Provide ecological consultants, Local Planning Authorities and developers with generic advice on European Protected Species that encourages early site appraisal in the planning process. (High)	EN	O	A, PR
	2. Ensure that, where developments may adversely affect great crested newt breeding sites, the developer is required to conduct a full survey in the appropriate season and to assess the impact of their proposals on any colonies of newts found. (High)	LAs, EN, WT, HA, Developers	O	A, PR
	3. Review known great crested newt breeding sites and seek to extend SSSI designation to the best sites. (Low)	EN, WT	O	SS, RM
	4. Ensure that all sites are identified that qualify as BHSs by virtue of populations of great crested newts (Low)	BHS P/ship	O	SS, RM
2. Promote land management that benefits great crested newts	1. By 2002 review designated sites at which great crested newts occur to assess whether management of aquatic and terrestrial habitat promotes long-term survival of populations (High)	EN, BHS P/ship	M	RM

	2. Ensure great crested newts are recognised and promoted as a priority species when setting targets for Countryside Stewardship and other agri-environmental schemes. (High)	MAFF, EN	S	P
	3. Encourage appropriate management of agricultural land through advice and targeting of agri-environmental payments (High)	MAFF, EN BHSP, FWAG	O	A
	4. Encourage sympathetic management and restoration of disused quarries, brown-field sites, highway balancing ponds and recreation areas such as parks and golf courses. (Medium)	EN, Mineral industry, WT, LCC, EA, HA, LAs	O	A, LM
	5. Discourage the introduction of fish to ponds with newt populations. (Low)	Land-owners, Angling Clubs, EA, NWW, EN	O	A, LM
<b>Broad Objective:</b>	<b>C. Assist the natural establishment of new self-sustaining populations through the restoration of 'pondways' and of landscapes rich in ponds (so-called 'pondscapes').</b>			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Create new ponds for great crested newts (with suitable linkages and sufficient terrestrial habitat) at five sites per year (2002 - 2006) within 400 m of existing populations.	1. Identify areas in southern and western Lancashire for possible pond creation initiatives that would help connect fragmented areas of existing 'pondscape'. (High)	LCC, BHS P/ship, EN	S	RM
	2. Investigate sources of funding accessible to landowners to create and maintain ponds (High)	BHS P/ship, FWAG	S	RM

	3. Liaise with landowners to take forward pond creation projects. (High)	BHSP, FWAG	M	A, LM
<b>Broad Objective:</b>	<b>D. Establish new populations of great crested newts at suitable sites within the species' historic range in Lancashire*</b>			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Introduce great crested newts to former sites or newly-created ponds where appropriate conditions exist.	1. Identify suitable opportunities for introduction of the great crested newt. (Low)	WT, EN, LCC	M	RM
	2. Oversee introduction projects. (Low)	WT, EN, LCC	L	LM

(\*The wholesale translocation of populations from one site to another does not fall within this definition.)

<b>Broad Objective:</b>	<b>E. Establish great crested newt as a 'flagship' species for Ponds.</b>			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Promote a wider and more sympathetic understanding of amphibian conservation and the conservation of their wetland and terrestrial habitats.	1. Distribute guidance for Local Authorities, developers, land managers and others on legal obligations for the species and advice on management for the species. (Medium)	DETR, EN	O	PR

#### Related Action Plans:

- Arable farmland HAP
- Sand Dune HAP
- Woodlands HAP
- Natterjack Toad SAP

#### References & additional reading:

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Date: April 2001.