

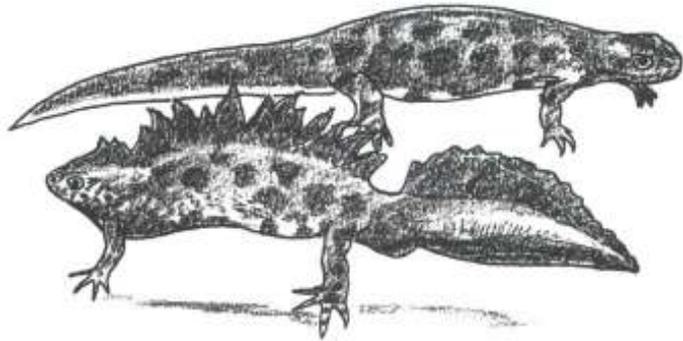
LONDON, ESSEX & HERTFORDSHIRE AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE TRUST

Registered Charity No. 1089466

Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) FACT SHEET No. 1

Recognition

Adults: 12 - 16 cm. The largest native British newt. In the breeding season, males have high jagged crests extending along the back and white speckles on the body. The tail has a broad white stripe along the side. The ventral surface is bright yellow/orange with variable black blotches.



Status & Distribution

Widespread but declining throughout England. Present in Wales, rare in Scotland and absent from Ireland.

General Ecology

Spends much of the year on land in shady, moist habitats, such as hedgerows, damp grasslands, scrub and woodland. It is active at night and feeds on slow moving invertebrates, such as worms, slugs and insect larvae. Hibernates on land in frost-free crevices, mammal burrows and deep in leaf litter.

In spring, between January and March, depending on weather and location, adults migrate to their large, fish-free ponds to breed. The males perform a courtship display or 'dance' in front of the female. The visual stimulus of the male's crest and waving tail, combined with a chemical attractant, ensures the female accepts the sperm packet produced at the end of the display on the floor of the pond. A few days later she begins to lay up to 300 eggs. Each one is carefully wrapped by the hind legs in the leaf of a water plant to protect them.

Breeding continues to the end of June when most adults will leave the pond and the crests of the males disappear. During this time the eggs hatch into carnivorous tadpoles that have feathery external gills. Metamorphosis occurs in early autumn and the young 'newtlets' leave the pond to spend the next 2 - 3 years on land. They return to the pond when sexually mature and may live

for up to 10 years in the wild, although captive animals have lived for 25 years. Most tadpoles, of course, never even survive to leave the pond.

Conservation

Despite the natural protection of a poisonous secretion which makes the adults unpalatable to most predators, the tadpoles are highly vulnerable to fish predation. Entire colonies can be wiped out by the introduction of fish - even sticklebacks. The loss of ponds since 1945 has caused a severe decline in the species. Lack of, or inappropriate, management at many remaining sites continues to threaten great crested newt populations.

As a result of the decline in colonies, the species was given full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and European legislation. It is an offence to kill, injure, sell disturb or handle great crested newts without a licence. Protection is also given to the breeding pond and the terrestrial habitat used by the animals.

Even with legal protection, losses continue largely through poor enforcement of the habitat protection and the general neglect of their breeding sites. A LEHART survey in Greater London in 1995 revealed a 42% decline in breeding sites over the past 20 years.

If you think great crested newts or their habitats around a pond are in danger through a development scheme or direct persecution, contact your county Amphibian & Reptile Group through the number below.

Frequent Questions

I have newts in my garden ponds - are they great crested newts?

They are most likely to be smooth newts that grow up to 11 cm in length. The males also develop a crest in spring but this has a wavy edge and is not serrated.

How can I make my garden pond attractive to great crested newts?

If you have a mature garden with plenty of ground cover and refuges, a large pond without fish, with good submerged water plants and food supply, then local great crested newts may enter the pond to breed. The introduction of great crested newts into ponds requires an English Nature licence. It is not to be recommended, as it is unlikely to succeed.

Further Information

Newts of the British Isles	P. Wisniewski	Shire Publications
Reptiles and amphibians in Britain	D. Frazer	Collins New Naturalist

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