

Great crested newts: Educational pond dipping and invertebrate surveys



Background

Pond dipping is a common activity in schools, field study centres and country parks. It can be an excellent way to enthuse and educate people, especially children, about the natural world. Great crested newts occur in some of these ponds, and may be caught or disturbed during pond dipping. Legal protection means it is an offence to capture or disturb great crested newts. Natural England is keen to encourage educational pond dipping, and this note sets out how the you can do this lawfully where great crested newts occur.

Surveys for aquatic invertebrates are commonly done by environmental consultants and students. Similar issues apply where great crested newts occur, as some invertebrate surveys use methods which can capture newts.

I want to undertake educational pond dipping in a pond which I know supports, or is likely to support, great crested newts. Do I need a licence?

Yes, this would be advisable if it is likely you will capture great crested newts. It is an offence to deliberately take great crested newts (taking would include temporary handling). A licence from Natural England allows you to take newts for educational purposes. Therefore if you are actively looking for great crested newts, or it is predictable that they will be caught as part of your pond dipping, then a licence is advisable.

The relevant application form is WML-A29 and can be found on our website at this address:

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing/forms.htm](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management/licensing/forms.htm)

The applicant must provide evidence of their experience of recognising amphibian species found in their area, which would thus enable them to educate those undertaking pond dipping. It is not essential for the applicant to have detailed knowledge of great crested newts in cases where the applicant only wishes to carry out educational pond dipping work and does not want to undertake any formal survey work. One reference is required. This does not have to be from a licensee, but from someone who can vouch for your educational and environmental credentials. The reference should state that you have some knowledge of amphibians.

I want to undertake pond dipping in ponds which have no records of great crested newts, and are unlikely to support this species. Do I need a licence?

If the ponds that you are working with have no records of great crested newts and are unlikely to be suitable then no great crested newt licence is required. If great crested newts are found during pond dipping then any great crested newts should be immediately returned to the pond. If you wish to undertake future pond dipping in an area where great crested newts were found then a licence (as described above) is required. To determine whether a pond is likely to support great crested newts, you may wish to try calculating the great crested newt Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). In itself, this is an interesting activity for advanced students. Guidance is at: www.narrs.org.uk/Documents/nasdocuments/HSI_guidance.pdf

Although the pond contains great crested newts, I think I can avoid capturing them by using very careful pond dipping methods or timing. Do I need a licence for capturing?

No, if you do not capture newts. If you have no licence but exercise due care, law enforcement bodies are unlikely to take action over occasional, inadvertent capture of great crested newts.

I understand it is an offence to disturb great crested newts. Do I need a licence to cover this even if I will not capture them?

The law covering disturbance of great crested newts is complex (for further details, see guidance on [Defra website](#)). In simple terms, low levels of disturbance whilst pond dipping are unlikely to be deemed unlawful, if you are not intending to disturb the newts. Therefore if you take reasonable care during pond dipping to avoid disturbing great crested newts i.e. avoid all vegetation, avoid disturbing the base or sides of the pond and use only a small number of nets, we would not expect you to apply for a licence. If this is not practical and great crested newts are likely to be present then we recommend you apply for a licence.

Good practice in educational pond dipping where great crested newts occur

There are several sources of advice on great crested newt ecology and survey methods, which you may find useful to study in advance of your dipping. The *Great crested newt conservation handbook* (Langton, Beckett & Foster, 2001) is a useful start, and is available to download free from Froglife's website (www.froglife.org). When dip-netting, try to avoid harming vegetation in the shallows as this is where newts lay eggs. We recommend that any great crested newts captured during pond dipping are kept out of the pond for a maximum of 30 minutes. They should always be kept in contact with water taken from the pond (at least 0.5cm depth in the base of a tray will suffice). Putting a newt into a glass or clear plastic tank with >5cm depth of water can be useful to demonstrate appearance and swimming behaviour to your class. Handling should be done only by the session leader. To minimise the chance of spreading disease, disposable vinyl gloves should be worn if handling newts (these can be purchased cheaply from supermarkets). You can avoid handling by transferring newts from the net bag straight into the tank or tray, and by releasing from there directly into the pond. Always release the newt back into the pond where it was caught. Special care should be taken when capturing great crested newt larvae as they are extremely delicate. Larvae should be kept out of the pond for a maximum of 5 minutes. Both adults and larvae should be kept out of direct sunlight when captured, as high water temperatures can be harmful.

Do I need a great crested newt licence to undertake an invertebrate survey in a pond which contains, or is suspected to contain, great crested newts?

Yes, if the pond is known to contain great crested newts before you start, or is found to contain great crested newts during the invertebrate survey, then a licence is required if your work is likely to capture great crested newts. Natural England can issue a licence for the purpose of science and education to allow newt capture during the invertebrate survey, even if great crested newts are not the subject of the survey. The applicant will need to provide (with references) details of their ability to survey for their target species, regardless of whether this is a protected species, as this will provide the justification for issuing a licence for scientific purposes. The applicant will also need to provide a rationale as to the benefit of surveying ponds which are likely to contain great crested newts and why they are no other alternative ways to gather the information. In practice this is a simple process, and Natural England does not wish to hinder invertebrate surveys which take due care over incidental newt capture.

However, if the pond that you are working on has no records of great crested newts and is unlikely to be suitable for the species, then no great crested newt licence is required.

Further information

Further advice on applying for licences can be obtained by contacting Natural England's Wildlife Management & Licensing Service:

E-mail: wildlife@naturalengland.org.uk

www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing

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