

THE GREAT CRESTED NEWT

The great crested newt is one of Europe's most impressive amphibians. Both sexes grow to about 15cm long. The dorsal skin is dark brown to black, with darker spots, a granular texture, and very fine white spots on the flanks. In contrast the underside is strikingly marked with orange/yellow and black. In the breeding season males develop prominent dorsal crests and have silvery tail stripes.

WHERE GREAT CRESTED NEWTS ARE FOUND

The great crested newt is found in lowland habitats across Northern Europe. This newt is widely distributed throughout most of England, but is rare in Cornwall, Devon and parts of Wales and Scotland. It can use a variety of water bodies for breeding but is most often found in medium to large sized ponds, typically on farm land. Outside the breeding season it needs land with plenty of ground cover for foraging, sheltering and hibernation. This usually takes the form of undisturbed rough grassland, scrub or woodland.

PROBLEMS AND THREATS

If they are going to thrive, amphibians need networks of ponds linked by suitable habitat.

The general decline of amphibians has been caused by agricultural intensification and urban developments which have had serious adverse effects on ponds and their surroundings.

The great crested newt is rather more demanding in its habitat requirements than the other widespread British amphibians and has been affected more severely.

If ponds are not managed they can lose their value to newts by becoming silted up or too heavily shaded by trees.

Other serious threats are the introduction of fish and the restriction of newts to isolated ponds.



A female great crested newt on land

CONSERVATION ACTION

As the great crested newt is becoming less common in Britain, it is recognised as a priority for conservation action. It is protected under British and European law. A national Species Action Plan (SAP), endorsed by the UK Government, is being implemented in order to maintain the range, distribution and viability of existing populations. You can help conserve the great crested newt by:

- making new ponds,
- restoring degraded ponds,
- managing terrestrial habitat for newts,
- sending in details of newt observations to local Biological Record Centres.

The Herpetological Conservation Trust, Froglife and the British Herpetological Society are Lead Partners for the SAP and are working with others to improve the status of this newt in Britain.

More details about great crested newt ecology and conservation are provided in the Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook by Tom Langton, Catherine Beckett and Jim Foster published by Froglife (2001).

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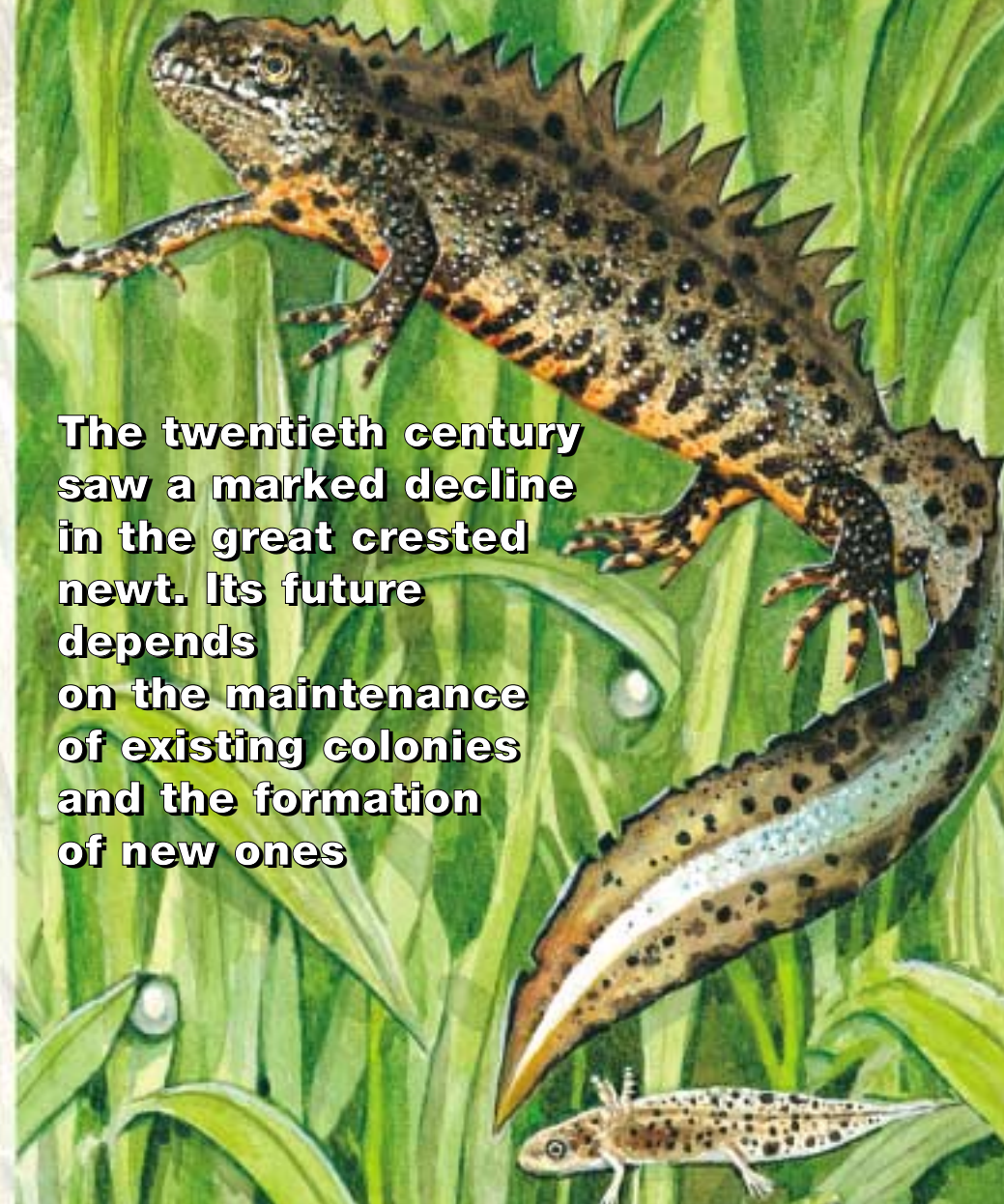
FROGLife



Cymdeithas Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales

THE CONSERVATION OF GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

A BRIEF GUIDE TO HABITAT MANAGEMENT



The twentieth century saw a marked decline in the great crested newt. Its future depends on the maintenance of existing colonies and the formation of new ones

Isolated ponds are vulnerable to natural changes and apparently innocent human actions. These changes make them less suitable for newts whose long-term survival depends on additional ponds within a few hundred metres or so.

Ponds in pasture fields often make good breeding sites for great crested newts.

Disused pits and small quarries often provide both ponds and good terrestrial habitat for newts.

Good ponds for great crested newt can be found in towns, villages and open woodland.

Low density grazing, which leaves a tussocky grassland structure, maintains good newt habitat

✗ Ponds should be kept isolated from ditches etc. to reduce the chances of polluted water or fish accidentally entering the pond

Fencing can prevent cattle from trampling and fouling ponds

Newts can easily cross minor roads. Wider roads and ones with high kerb stones, present a serious problem when newts move to or from their ponds.

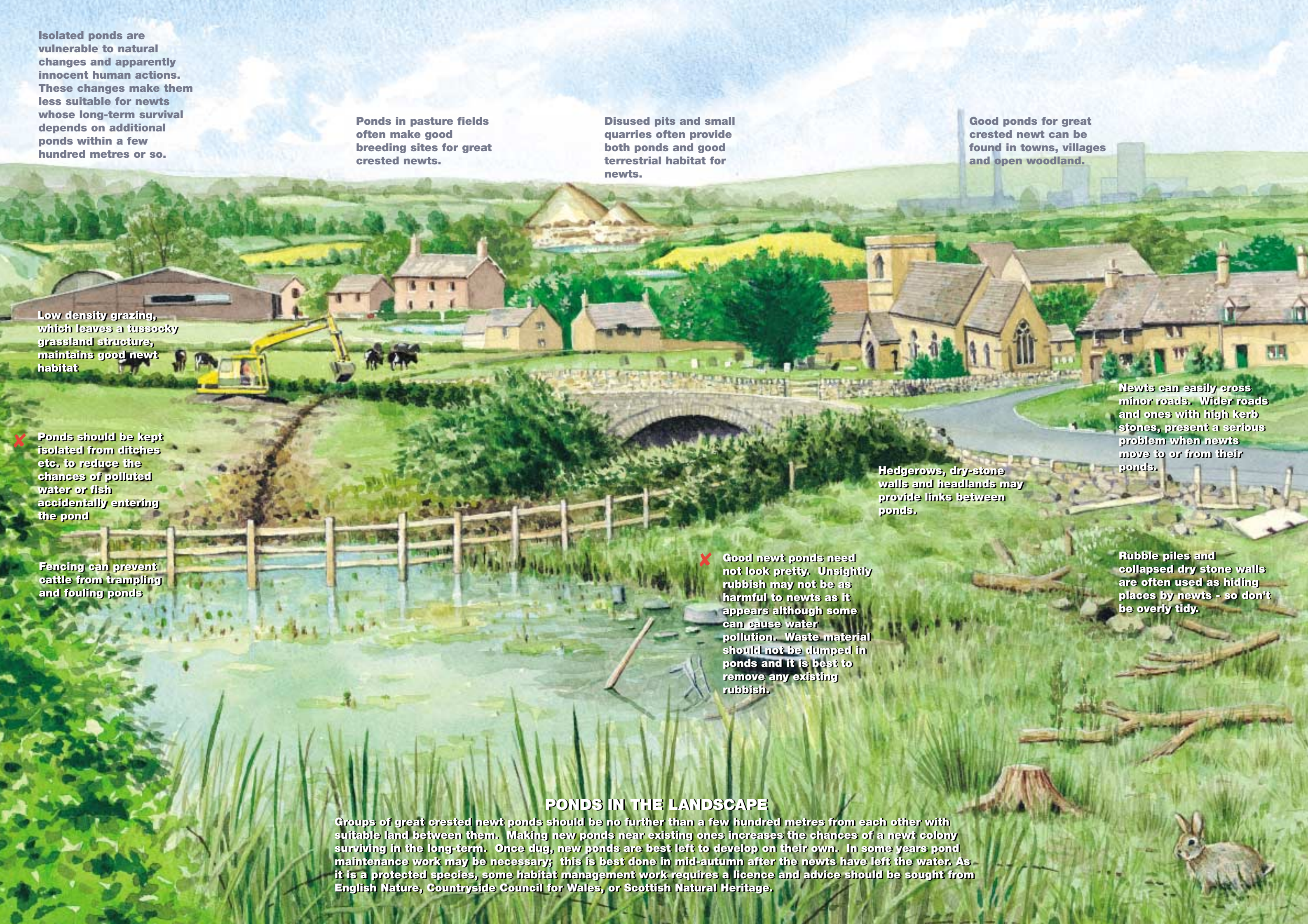
Hedgerows, dry-stone walls and headlands may provide links between ponds.

✗ Good newt ponds need not look pretty. Unsightly rubbish may not be as harmful to newts as it appears although some can cause water pollution. Waste material should not be dumped in ponds and it is best to remove any existing rubbish.

Rubble piles and collapsed dry stone walls are often used as hiding places by newts - so don't be overly tidy.

PONDS IN THE LANDSCAPE

Groups of great crested newt ponds should be no further than a few hundred metres from each other with suitable land between them. Making new ponds near existing ones increases the chances of a newt colony surviving in the long-term. Once dug, new ponds are best left to develop on their own. In some years pond maintenance work may be necessary; this is best done in mid-autumn after the newts have left the water. As it is a protected species, some habitat management work requires a licence and advice should be sought from English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, or Scottish Natural Heritage.



To prevent the spread of pest species, do not put any plants or animals from garden ponds or garden centres into ponds in the countryside.

Dry-stone walls and hedgerows provide newts with places to hide and safe routes between ponds.

Undisturbed scrub and woodland provide good land habitat

Rough vegetation around the pond provides important cover for newly emerged young newts

✗ Ducks and geese in large numbers eat pond vegetation and pollute the water.

Undisturbed or lightly grazed grassland provides opportunities for newts to hide in mammal burrows, under logs, rocks etc or in holes and crevices.

In weed-free parts of the pond male newts display and court females.

✗ All sizes of newt larvae are eaten by fish. Fish can wipe out a colony of newts.

Water weeds in the shallows are used for egg laying and provide good hunting grounds for young newt larvae.

Newts often hide under objects left lying on the ground.



A GREAT CRESTED NEWT POND AND ADJACENT LAND

Newts need ponds with a sunny aspect and hospitable surroundings.