



## Great Crested Newt Survey Pond at Poulshot Green, Poulshot, Wiltshire

### 1. Introduction

This survey was carried out for the residents of Poulshot at the request of Mr. Paul Darby at Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The objective of the survey was to determine whether great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are present in a pond on Poulshot Green. Grid reference ST 96936 59846 (Figure 1).

### 2. Methodology

A single evening survey was carried out using a 500,000 candlepower torch to search for newts in the water. It was not necessary to carry out more survey visits.

The survey was carried out on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2005. Great crested newts are in their breeding ponds at this time of year.

The survey was carried out Mr. Colin Menendez, a consultant ecologist with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. He is an experienced herpetologist licensed by English Nature (the Government's statutory nature conservation advisor) to survey great crested newts. The survey was carried out on a voluntary basis.

### 3. Results

One male and one female great crested newt were seen in the pond.

Survey conditions were suitable: generally clear skies with recent light rain, air temperature 13.3 °C and water 5.7 °C. However, the pond had abundant vegetation in it and this would have reduced the proportion of seen newts.

#### 4. Conclusions and observations

The pond contains great crested newts. It is likely to be a breeding population. The number seen suggests a small population, although the survey was constrained by the dense aquatic vegetation and it being carried out immediately after dusk (more newts are likely to have been seen a little later in the evening; six survey visits are usually carried out to determine population sizes).

The pond appears to be a good, typical pond for great crested newts. The water was deep, clear and had plenty of aquatic vegetation for the newts to shelter amongst and to lay their eggs on. No fish were seen (fish predate newt larvae) and no waterfowl except one moorhen. It is understood that the pond's water is ground water augmented by surface water channelled from hardstandings at the adjacent homes (the residents ensure no pollutants enter this water).

In the long-term the pond and its newts would benefit from the occasional clearing of some of the denser aquatic vegetation (the duckweed, reedmace and areas of silt with dense mats of amphibious grass for example). This clearance will allow more light and warmth into the pond and will create open areas for courtship by newts. Affect no more than a quarter of the pond in any year and work in November and December (and certainly not from February to August when newts are more likely to be in the pond).

The absence of fish and waterfowl is good for the newts (and for the water quality, attractiveness and rich diversity of wildlife of the pond). Remove any fish that are found in the pond and do not encourage waterfowl by feeding them.

Note that great crested newts are protected by law (Appendix 1). Guidance on conservation licences for work affecting ponds containing great crested newts is given in Appendix 2. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust can probably help organise any necessary licence.

The pond's surrounding terrestrial habitat is also important. The pond is in a village green. The green is grassland and much of it is an attractive swath of tall grassland. Roadways are gravel tracks with no apparent subterranean drainage system (which is a good feature, because gully pots can trap and kill amphibians). Gardens around the green are mature and likely to also be good terrestrial habitat for the newts. Great crested newts spend about three quarters of the year on their terrestrial habitat around a breeding pond. Most newts will remain close to the pond (within 50 metres for example), but they have been found up to 1.3 km from their ponds. English Nature's general guidance is that suitable habitats within 250m of a breeding pond are likely to be used most frequently.

There are 16 ponds within 1 km including four within 250 m of the surveyed pond shown on the local Ordnance Survey map (Figure 1). If these ponds are suitable for great crested newts then it is likely that they might also support them. The continued connectivity of the pond on the green to this likely wider metapopulation is important for the long-term survival and growth of the local newt population.

Great crested newts have suffered a major decline in Britain. Much of this loss is due to changes in the agricultural landscape especially the considerable loss and degradation of ponds in recent decades. Development has also destroyed ponds and their surrounding terrestrial habitat.

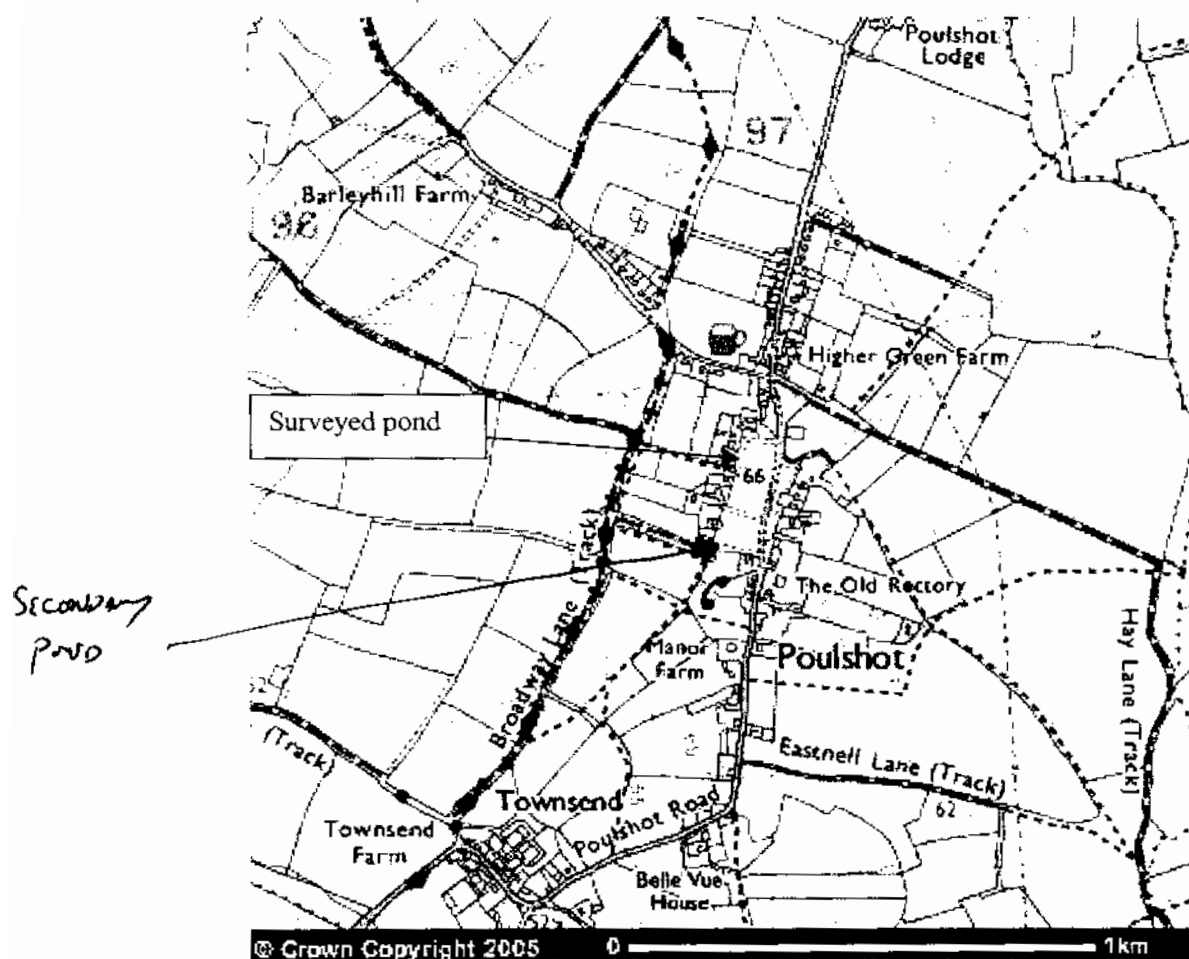
Recent work by Chalkhill Environmental Consultants (the consultancy wing for Wiltshire Wildlife Trust) and the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre for English Nature has shown that there are about 120 waterbodies with great crested newts recorded in them comprising about 80 populations in the Kennet, North Wiltshire and Thamesdown region. Therefore, the population at Poulshot is arguably noteworthy in a regional context, in addition to its legal protection.

Colin T. Menendez. 2005

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**Figure 1.**

The pond surveyed at Poulshot Green. Ordnance Survey licence no. AL-50599A



## Appendix 1

### Summary notes on the legislation protecting great crested newts and their habitat.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Habitats Regulations 1994 protect great crested newts.

It is an offence to:

- Kill, injure, capture or disturb great crested newts; or
- Obstruct the access of great crested newts to areas they use for protection, resting and breeding as well as damage or destroy these areas.

As well as intentional and deliberate actions recent legislation (CRoW Act 2000) now includes 'reckless' acts that affect great crested newts and their habitat (aquatic and terrestrial) as being an offence.

## Appendix 2

### **Guidance note from English Nature: Great Crested Newts. Conservation licences for pond management work**

#### What is a conservation licence?

Conservation licences are issued by English Nature under regulation 44(2)(c) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 and Section 16 (3)(c) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Such licences can only be issued if they meet the purpose of conservation. Conservation licences will be issued to protect a population which is under threat because of natural degradation.

#### When is a conservation licence required?

A licence is only required if the work would otherwise be an offence i.e. disturbance of newts or damage or destruction of breeding site or resting place. Work to improve the habitat for great crested newts is not considered as damage to the breeding site or resting place. However, such work may disturb great crested newts.

English Nature advises that work on ponds where great crested newts occur should normally be undertaken between November to January inclusive when the work is least likely to cause disturbance. (Note however that ponds supporting large numbers of hibernating frogs should not be significantly disturbed during very cold weather; such ponds should may be best managed in November) English Nature recommends that shortly before pond management work commences a survey of the immediate area is undertaken. Licences for surveys can be issued by English Nature for scientific purposes. A survey for great crested newts should be undertaken by someone who is appropriately licensed. The results of this survey will determine whether a conservation licence is required.

#### What if great crested newts are not found in the survey prior to the work?

If great crested newts are not found as the result of the survey in the area where the proposed pond management or other work will occur then the work can continue without the need for a conservation licence.

#### What if great crested newts are found in the survey prior to the work?

If great crested newts are found during the survey which was undertaken immediately prior to the works a conservation licence application should be made to English Nature to disturb great crested newts to facilitate the pond management work.

#### How do I apply for a conservation licence?

All applications for conservation licences will need to state how their work will benefit the conservation of the species concerned and will be assessed by the species specialist as part of the licence decision making process. A conservation licence will not normally be issued by English Nature for both survey work and conservation work in one licence.

According to the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 a conservation licence can only be issued if 'there is no satisfactory alternative' to the work and English Nature are satisfied 'that the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.' The applicant will need to provide details of what alternative solutions have been considered and why they have proved unsuitable and details of a survey so that we can be assured that the work will not be detrimental to the conservation status. The applicant will also need to provide clear details of the work programme and a timetable for licensable operations. Such information should be provided on an application form which is available from English Nature at the address below.

How do I proceed if great crested newts are found in the survey yet the work does not meet the purpose of a conservation licence?

Licences are available from DEFRA and English Nature for other specific purposes. If you proceed with the work where great crested newts are present without an appropriate licence you may be committing an offence. Contact English Nature for details or licence application forms regarding scientific, survey or conservation licences;

Licensing Service English Nature Northminster House Peterborough PE1 1UA  
Telephone: (01733) 455136 Fax: (01733) 455147

English Nature licence application forms and other relevant information is available on our website: [www.english-nature.org.uk/science/licensing](http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/licensing)

Where can I find guidance of pond management or restoration?

- 1 The Pond Book; A guide to the management and creation of ponds, by P. Williams, J. Biggs, M. Whitfield, A. Thorne, S. Bryant, G. Fox and P. Nicolet. (2000) Published by the Ponds Conservation Trust, Oxford.
- 2 English Nature. (1996) 'Management of great crested newt habitat' Herps 2.3 in the Species Conservation Handbook

(Version: August 2002)