

Standing Advice Species Sheet: White clawed crayfish

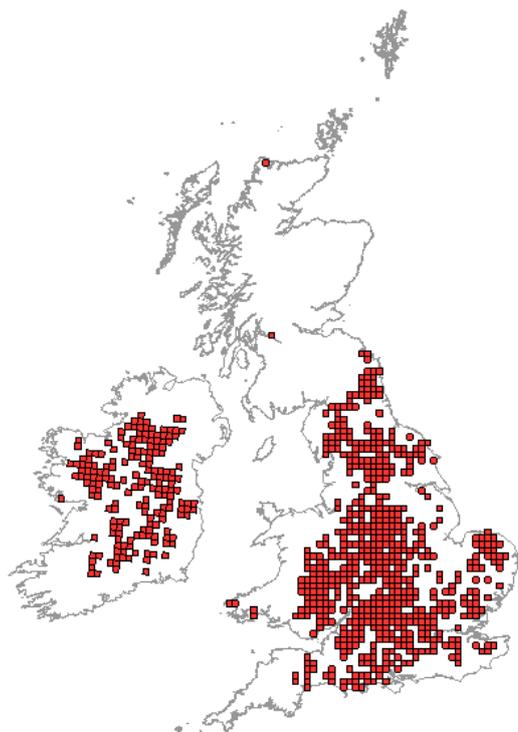
1. Typical Habitat/Features Used

1.1 Crayfish distribution in the British Isles is largely determined by geology and water quality. The white clawed crayfish occurs in areas with relatively hard, mineral-rich waters on calcareous and rapidly weathering rocks. It is found in a wide variety of environments, including canals, streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs and water-filled quarries. The white clawed crayfish is typically found in watercourses of 0.75 m to 1.25 m deep, but the species may occur in very shallow streams (about 5 cm of water) and in deeper, slow-flowing rivers (2.5 m). It may be more abundant in watercourses flowing north-south due to the increased shading this aspect provides. The white clawed crayfish typically occupies cryptic habitats under rocks and submerged logs, among tree roots, algae and macrophytes, although it usually emerges to forage for food. Juveniles in particular may also be found among cobbles and detritus such as leaf litter. Adults may burrow into suitable substrates, particularly in the winter months.

1.2 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan contains a white clawed crayfish Species Action Plan (SAP). For further information, please visit <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=5155>

2. Distribution

2.1 The white clawed crayfish is the only species of freshwater crayfish which is native to the UK. It is widespread in clean, calcareous streams, rivers and lakes in England and Wales and occurs in a few areas in Northern Ireland, but many populations have been lost since the 1970s.



Distribution of white clawed crayfish

The absence of a record does not necessarily mean the absence of white clawed crayfish in the area but could be a result of no survey data being available for that particular area.

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Note: The Data Provider, Original Recorder [where identified], Natural England and the NBN Trust bear no responsibility for any further analysis or interpretation of this material, data and/or information.

3. Legislation

3.1 White clawed crayfish are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally take white clawed crayfish from the wild. Under this Act, it is an offence to:

- Sell, or attempt to sell, and part of a white clawed crayfish, alive or dead, or advertise that he buys or sells, or intends to buy or sell any part of a white clawed crayfish.

3.2 Details of the legislation can be found at:

Wildlife and Countryside Act

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents>

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000037_en_7#pt3-pb8-l1g81

3.3 A summary of the protection afforded to species can be found within the main standing advice text.

4. Survey Requirements

4.1 All surveys should be undertaken by suitably experienced, and where necessary, licensed surveyors.

4.2 Habitat assessments can be undertaken at any time of year but surveys can only take place from mid-July to the end of September to ensure females are not disturbed while carrying eggs. The main survey technique used is active searching in suitable habitat, though this method is only suitable during times of base (i.e. low) flow in streams. Night searching by torch is recognised as an effective method in addition to trapping, which may be a suitable option in deep, slow moving pools where active searches cannot be conducted.

4.3 Trapping is the only way of finding out if crayfish are present in watercourses which are too deep or turbid for manual searches, only a small number should be caught. Trapping surveys should include:

- Using a plastic mesh trap with a funnel entrance baited with scraps of fish or even cat food which are inspected the next day after setting.

4.4. It should be noted that the information provided above is a brief summary of the good practice guidelines and does not replace such guidelines. It is intended as an overview for Local Authority Planning Staff and whilst it may provide useful information for applicants and ecological consultants, surveys should be carried out in accordance with the current good practice guidelines.

5. Mitigation required

5.1 In areas where white clawed crayfish are present and work needs to be carried out, all practical measures must be carried out to avoid or minimise the impacts on white clawed crayfish. The activity should aim to ensure the long term survival of the resident breeding population; once the work has been carried out, the habitat should remain suitable for crayfish in the long term. Depending on the type of project the following mitigation measures may be required:

- Minimise the amount of disturbance to the river bank.
- Minimise the length of channel affected.

- Where feasible, bank and channel work should be carried out in small sections rather than all at once.
- Install measures to minimise siltation.
- Prevent any pollution of water courses.
- Provide a replacement habitat for the crayfish if the work involves a permanent loss of habitat.
- Include aquatic and emergent vegetation in channel design.
- If relocating crayfish a suitable habitat prepared in advance will be required.

5.2 Exclusion of crayfish from construction areas can only take place in either April or from July to October inclusive.

5.3 As the lead partner for white clawed crayfish conservation in England, we recommend that the Environment Agency is also consulted in relation to the results of any crayfish survey and mitigation proposed as this standing advice only relates to Natural England's engagement with protected species. Contact details for the local Environment Agency office can be found at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/contactus/36324.aspx>

6. Licensing requirements

6.1 Licences are available from Natural England to allow taking or handling of crayfish for scientific or educational purposes, such as surveys, or for conservation purposes. There is no provision under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 for licensing what would otherwise be offences for the purpose of development, maintenance or land management. Such activities must be covered by the defence in the Act that permits otherwise illegal actions if they are the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably be avoided. This defence can only be tested in court, so it is important to demonstrate that every option which would have prevented an offence being committed had been considered before relying on a statutory defence.

6.2 For further information regarding licences that can be issued please visit our website at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing/docs/wlms-faqs.pdf>.

7. Useful references

Monitoring the White Clawed Crayfish

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/IN16>

Ecology of the White Clawed Crayfish

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/IN101>

Peay, S (2000) Guidance of Works affecting White Clawed Crayfish. English Nature, Peterborough

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/whiteclawedcrayfish_tcm6-10859.pdf

Referencing: For ease of reference, if you are quoting from the standing advice, we recommend you refer to the relevant paragraph/box number preceded by the three figure reference code in the top left hand corner of the species sheet