



The Ecology Consultancy

Briefing

Issue 5

Great Crested Newts and you!

Don't forget to book your next round of surveys...

Great crested newts are amphibians which can be found in rural, urban and suburban sites usually preferring medium-sized ponds. However, they will inhabit any body of water including temporary pools. They spend most of their time on land – in rough grassland, scrub, woodland and under logs and stones usually within 250m to 500m of the breeding pond. They are largely nocturnal.

The Ecology Consultancy carries out surveys for great crested newts from March to June, when the animals are in their breeding ponds. Our ecologists undertake torchlight and sweep-netting and set bottle-traps during the evening and return to the site in the early hours of the following morning to count and release the newts. Vegetation is also inspected for eggs. This exercise is repeated four times to assess presence or absence of the species with an additional two visits to make an estimate of population.

Continued over...

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- Non-native invasive plants
- White Paper consultation/response
- High Speed 2 - new rail link



Great Crested Newts and you!
continued...

Great crested newts are European Protected Species (EPS) and are therefore protected against killing, capture, injury and disturbance. The places they use for shelter or protection are also protected against damage, destruction or obstruction. If a great crested newt (adult, juvenile or larva) is found (or suspected) on site after works have started, all operations in the area must stop immediately and expert advice sought. A 'development licence' and appropriate mitigation may be required before works can proceed. Only EPS licence holders are permitted to survey, handle or move GCN as these actions are generally considered likely to disturb the animals.



Bottle trapping Great crested newts

Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Unit reported that for the period 1st April to 30th September 2010 a total of 1,072 EPS mitigation licence applications were processed for great crested newts.

Breaking the law can lead to fines of up to £5000 per offence and, potentially, prison sentences of up to six months. Any vehicle or other plant used to commit the offence may be held liable.

Case law stipulates that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must have wildlife data before determining a planning application, in order to comply with Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act). The Ecology Consultancy recommends that wildlife surveys are undertaken before planning permission is sought, allowing development to be designed to avoid impacts on the habitats of protected species. If impacts are unavoidable, mitigation proposals must be incorporated and new habitat created to replace what is destroyed. Irrespective of whether development impacts on protected species, there is always potential for enhancement of wildlife habitat.

Non-native invasive species an update

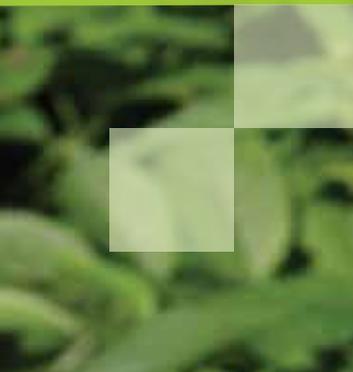
In April 2010, revised legislation came into force concerning non-native species.

The new order updates Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100609_en_1). It lists species that may not be released or introduced without a licence, allowed to escape into the wild, or caused to be spread in the wild. Most accidental or deliberate introductions have a benign effect on native wildlife, but a minority of non-native species exhibit invasive qualities and have a negative impact on native wildlife.

Also in April, the Environment Agency produced *Managing Invasive Non-native Plants*, (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0410BSBR-e-e.pdf>) a collection of fact-files on seven plant species including giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. This useful document emphasises the importance of reporting the presence of such plants, and lists acceptable forms of disposal, which can be complicated; a case in point is Japanese knotweed.

Japanese knotweed was first introduced in the mid-nineteenth century as an ornamental garden plant. Since then it has spread to a range of habitats – particularly roadsides, riverbanks and derelict land – and can cause serious problems by displacing native flora and even causing structural damage.

The Ecology Consultancy employs experts in the identification and control of invasive plants. We are conversant with the DEFRA codes of practice <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/post/postpn303.pdf> for the management of non-native invasive species.



Himalayan Balsam



On the list – Water primrose GBNNSS

Image Non-native Species Secretariat



Getting involved...

The GB Non-Native Species Secretariat has launched an online recording scheme so that members of the public can help establish the extent of our problems with invasive non-native species. Ten animal and plant species have been chosen, based on criteria such as invasiveness, ease of identification and usefulness of data to the recording scheme. Recorders are asked to upload a photo of their sighting, and these will be checked and verified. Go to www.nonnativespecies.org/recording where you will find information and images for the ten species and online recording forms.



There are laws governing non-native plants and the Government also has powers to ban the sale of invasive plants. *Keeping Ponds and Aquaria Without Harmful Invasive Plants*, published by Plantlife and the Royal Horticultural Society, gives helpful guidance to gardeners and landscapers about the species to avoid planting in aquatic situations. Dumping unwanted plants in local streams or ponds is an offence.

Visit the Plantlife website for more details: http://www.plantlife.org.uk/publications/keeping_ponds_and_aquaria_without_harmful_invasive_plants/

On the list – Sika deer GBNNSS

DEFRA consultation on the wider countryside

In October, The Ecology Consultancy responded to the Department for Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) latest consultation, “An Invitation to Shape the Nature of England”. This will feed into a new Environment White Paper in 2011.

Our main concern is the lack of fully trained and experienced ecologists, a lack which is likely to increase with the fallout from the Comprehensive Spending Review. We would like to see more ecologists employed at all levels, to help to ensure the true value of our natural resources is realised and that decisions are not based on what is generally perceived to be of high nature conservation value (e.g. nitrate rich green fields).

DEFRA's view, as presented in the consultation documents, is that the long-term goal of an 'ecosystems' or 'landscape' approach to protecting biodiversity can be achieved by devolving all powers and decisions to the local community and local authorities. This is unworkable in our opinion. We believe this would result in a greater piecemeal approach to development and land management practices, and one that is open to NIMBYism. We would like to see greater support for landscape-scale and green infrastructure initiatives.

We suggested that Environmental Stewardship schemes should be linked more effectively with green infrastructure policies to deliver a coherent approach to protecting biodiversity, also that land owners, farmers and managers should be rewarded for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity on their land.

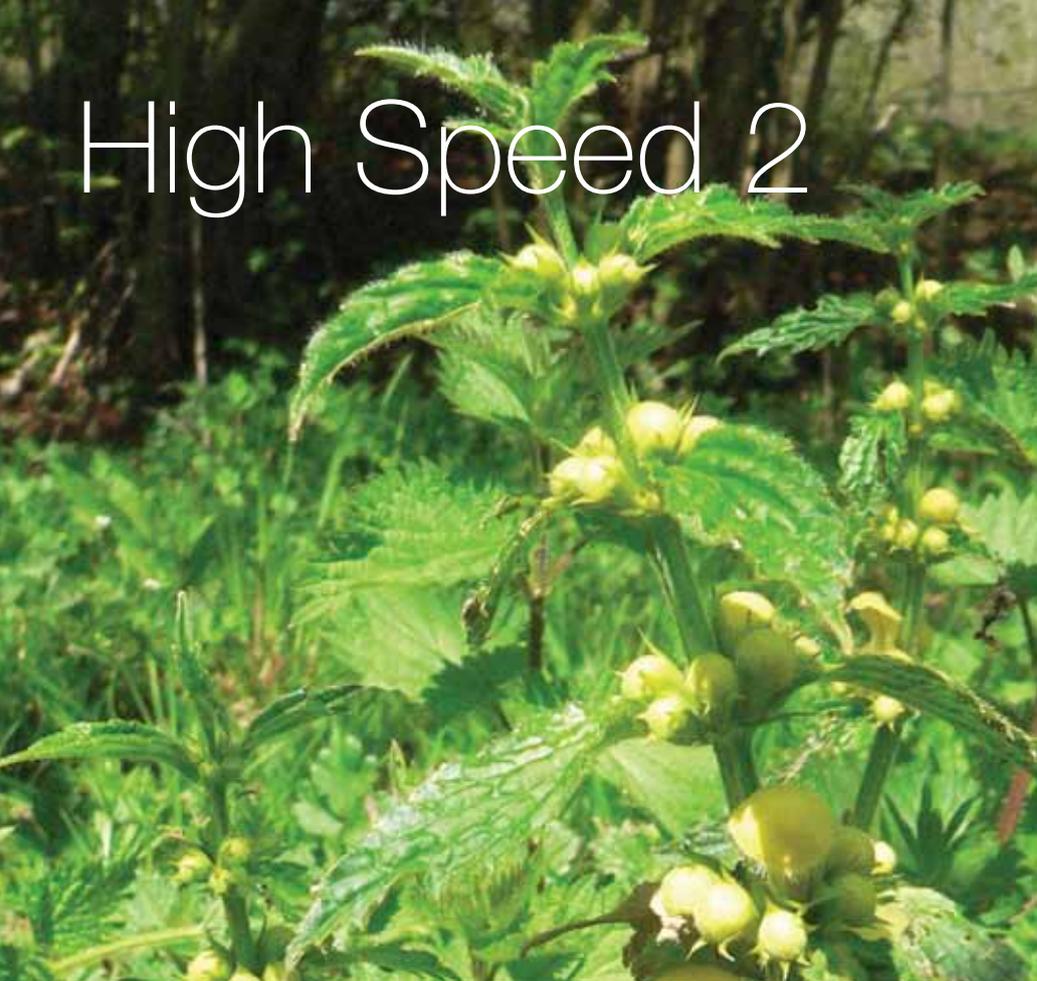
We asked that the existing voluntary codes such as Code for Sustainable Homes (CfSH) and Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) are strengthened and we urged more government incentives to integrate green walls, green roofs etc. into existing and new developments. More awards in industry would encourage sectors to join in.

We also mentioned non-BAP habitats, such as species-poor neutral grassland, sedge beds and amenity grassland, which have not been recognised in the DEFRA document. We know that they are important for biodiversity, often providing foraging areas for bats and birds. We want to see these sites identified and protected as 'common habitats with wildlife value'.

Overall, we urged the Government to demonstrate commitment to conserving the UK's wildlife and biodiversity by giving unwavering protection for important wildlife habitats, even when there is severe economic or political pressure to compromise such places.



High Speed 2



Yellow archangel - ancient woodland indicator

The Ecology Consultancy was part of the team preparing an Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS) for the proposed HS2 rail link from London to the West Midlands. From London Euston, the Government's preferred route would enter the Chiltern District, initially in a tunnel via Chalfont St Peter and Chalfont St Giles, then emerge above ground at the far end of Old Amersham. It would then continue through Aylesbury Vale to Birmingham.

We used GIS mapping to carry out proximity analyses of features of international, national and regional importance, including Natura 2000 Sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species, and Local Nature Reserves. The analysis also involved a review of the citations and conservation objectives of these areas to assess the potential for impacts from the construction and operation of HS2. We took part in a number of multi-disciplinary workshops with engineers and other environmental specialists to contribute to an overall AoS of the route options.

Our team of ecologists also prepared the scoping report for the Habitat Regulations Assessment that considered the possible impacts on European sites of nature conservation importance of various options and at different stages of the route selection process.

The Ecology Consultancy are also part of the sustainability team for the HS2 Leeds and East Midlands leg of the scheme and will work on the AoS during 2011.

Advice from Natural England

Natural England consulted on new standing advice for protected species over the summer, which is aimed at local planning authorities. The advice applies to the Home Counties, the New Forest, South Downs National Park, and Metropolitan London Boroughs: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south_east/ourwork/standingadvice/protectedspecies/standingadviceconsultation/default.aspx From the end of September 2010, Natural England's London and the South East regions withdrew from offering case-specific advice on protected species to local planning authorities. They will instead rely largely on the new standing advice which provides written guidance on:

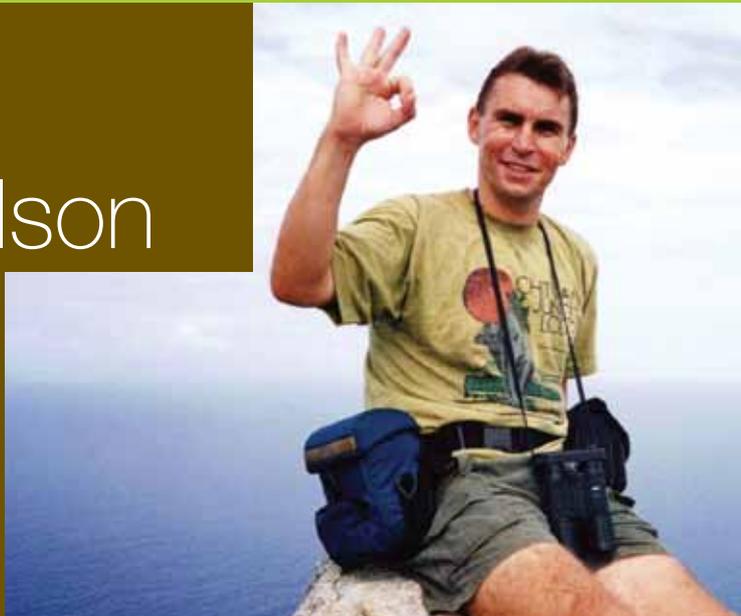
- When to request a protected species survey
- What level of survey effort is required and what a survey for a specific species involves
- How to assess the appropriateness of a protected species survey
- How to assess the appropriateness of any proposed mitigation and secure the delivery of the mitigation and any necessary ongoing habitat management

A new range of protected species sheets have been produced, including higher and lower plants, white-clawed crayfish and invertebrates. Workshops, training and awareness-raising measures have been improved, but we would question if this can really replace the role of expert advisors. Two Natural England offices are to close in the South East following the recent government cuts.

The Ecology Consultancy conducts the full range of surveys for protected species and employs experts in mitigation and habitat enhancement. Our ecologists frequently assist local planning authorities to identify the need for wildlife surveys, and we provide training to their staff.

Barry Nicholson

The Ecology Consultancy suffered a terrible loss in September with the death of co-director Barry Nicholson. He helped to make the company what it is today, in particular developing our Norwich office and its consultancy work in East Anglia. Barry joined the company in its very early days after having worked closely with MD John Newton over the preceding years in organisations such as London Wildlife Trust. Barry's technical expertise and solid reliability and attention to detail made him an obvious choice for a Director's post. He will be sorely missed.



We welcomed two new staff to our London office in October – Matthew Wilson, Senior Ecologist, and Vicky Forder, Ecologist, both formerly with Mouchel, and said goodbye to Catherine Jones who is heading off to Peru for six months to pursue a number of conservation projects.

Caroline Nash will be working part-time throughout the winter to accommodate her research on house sparrows for the RSPB. We look forward to her returning full-time in the spring and wish her happy twittering over the winter!

Yvonne O'Keefe has joined us as finance manager and we are also pleased to welcome Jerry Kinsley, Ecologist, and Michelle Fielden, Assistant Ecologist, who have joined our Norwich office and George Siskos who joins the London team as GIS Mapping and Systems Assistant.

Breakfast briefing for local businesses

Our London office held a successful breakfast briefing for architects at the end of September. Managing Director John Newton presented the latest advice for the sector and all said how much they had valued the session. We will be running

more breakfast briefings from our three offices in 2011. If you are interested in knowing more about our Breakfast Briefings or our other CPD events please contact enquiries@ecologyconsultancy.co.uk.

Filling a skills shortage...

The Ecology Consultancy is committed to training ecology students for professional work. Our Lewes Office recently accepted a BSc Conservation and Wildlife Management student from Sparsholt College on a one-month placement for 2011, and another BSc Ecology student from Plumpton Agricultural College/ Brighton University is working with us part-time.

In the past the Lewes office has helped students on the MSc Biodiversity Survey from Sussex University. Some of these students have gone on to work for us, Natural England, and other consultancies. The Norwich office also hosts students from the UEA and Easton College. Our staff lecture on biodiversity, ecology and conservation management, as well as running courses for wildlife charities such as The Mammal Society, and Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

1000th fee quote issued!

Sam Phillips in our Norwich office issued our 1,000th fee proposal for 2010 in October. The winning proposal was for work with the contractor Costain. The Ecology Consultancy has an excellent and long-established relationship with Costain, having worked with them on many projects, large and small, around the country.

Dominic Keene, Costain Quantity Surveyor, said, "It feels great to be working with The Ecology Consultancy again. [They] always provide exceptional service and we value [their] advice on wildlife. We look forward to developing our relationship in the future."



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