

Experience in Great Crested Newt Mitigation: Guidance for Ecologists and Developers



1. Aims of this note

- To help ecological consultants to assess their skills and experience levels before applying for a EPS mitigation licence as a 'named' ecologist.
- To guide ecologists when assessing the skills and experience levels of accredited agents or assistants employed on mitigation schemes.
- To guide referees when writing references on behalf of the prospective 'named' ecologist.

Developers need to be confident that ecologists they appoint have relevant experience. Guidance on choosing a consultant is provided within our advice document on "[How to get a licence](#)"

Preparing a great crested newt mitigation scheme requires a range of skills to ensure that a proposed activity can proceed lawfully and without adversely affecting the favourable conservation status of the newts. Proposals inevitably vary in complexity and in their potential impacts on newts. It is the responsibility of the ecologist to ensure that he/she has the relevant skills and experience to carry out the work required for each application.

The first requirement for assessing the impact of a proposed activity on a great crested newt population is a survey. A sound survey, including an assessment of all available evidence, will enable any impacts to be accurately assessed. It is also crucial in subsequent mitigation planning

A consultant ecologist will need to have sufficient knowledge and practical experience of newt ecology and habitat requirements to analyse the survey data and assess the impacts of a proposed activity on the newt population, both at site level and in a wider perspective. This is crucial for the subsequent design and implementation of appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures.

Avoidance measures and/or mitigation plans for a particular scheme must be clear, achievable and discussed fully with planners and developers. A sound understanding of the planning system and construction industry is therefore essential to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure the delivery of realistic and proportionate mitigation schemes.

2. Skills and experience required

2.1. Ecological consultants

Skills are gained through training, experience, keeping abreast of the literature and giving due attention to details of survey, impact assessment and mitigation design and implementation. It is expected that a new applicant will have an understanding of the guidance given in the most recent edition of the *Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines* (English Nature, now Natural England) and the various guidance available on the Natural England internet site.

(a) Essential skills for a 'named' ecologist

The table below identifies the skills and experience required to successfully carry out a mitigation scheme and to be a 'named' ecologist on a EPS mitigation licence.

Ecologists who have held¹ or been named² on a mitigation licence within the last three years for a project with a similar scale, methodology and mitigation are not required to hold a personal survey licence, although this is highly desirable.

Ecologists who have previously held or been named on a EPS mitigation licence but not in the last three years are expected to provide evidence of their more recent great crested newt experience using this table as a guide, which includes the requirement to hold survey licence.

A new applicant should satisfy Natural England that he/she has achieved at least the minimum standard for each skill by providing brief, written evidence based on the guidance in the second column.

Skills and experience	Evidence
Identification of all widespread UK amphibians (all life stages) and working knowledge of survey methods (egg search, torch, net, bottle trap, pitfall and refuge).	Held own survey licence for at least three years. At least 3 seasons of surveying; to include surveys at a minimum of five great crested newt breeding ponds. Give details of any courses attended.
Understanding of great crested newt ecology.	Understanding of newt ecology from field experience, literature and attending conferences.
General knowledge of pond ecosystems and pond conservation.	Knowledge gained from field experience, literature and conferences.
Working knowledge of the great crested newt Habitat Suitability	Determination of HSI values at a minimum of 10 sites.

¹ those ecologists who have held a licence as the principal licensee (ie., pre the changes made in November 2007 where the principal licence holder became the landowner/developer).

² those ecologists who have (since November 2007) been named on the licence to assist the principal licence holder.

Index (HSI).	
Understanding of impact assessment for great crested newts.	Work on, or study of, method statements for at least three licensed projects.
Working knowledge of Local Authority planning, EPS legislation and licensing process:- assessing the risk of committing an offence, avoidance measures, planning mitigation strategies that will be effective, pragmatic and proportionate.	Work on at least three licensed great crested newt projects. Familiarity with the <i>Great crested newt mitigation guidelines</i> and licence application template.
Planning and implementing effective great crested newt habitat creation, enhancement and management including both pond creation and terrestrial habitat work.	Involvement in significant habitat works on at least three licensed great crested newt mitigation projects within the last five years.
Planning and implementing effective great crested newt capture and exclusion projects	Involvement in capture and exclusion works on at least three great crested newt mitigation projects within the last five years

Occasionally, it is evident that although a prospective 'named' ecologist can demonstrate all of the above, he/she submits an application that is substantially below the standard required. In such cases, we may decide the applicant does not demonstrate adequate application of experience to be named on a EPS mitigation licence. In these circumstances, we will provide the ecologist with our assessment report which will highlight the areas of concern and include constructive feedback on the issues that need to be addressed. This report can be used to improve the quality of future licence applications to achieve a successful outcome. If requested, we can also provide verbal feedback to the ecologist.

(b) Additional skills for a 'named' ecologist

Natural England expects 'named' ecologists to have the following skills but does not need supporting evidence:

- Welfare of amphibians during survey and mitigation.
- Communication skills, to allow effective liaison with planners, developers, landowners and others.
- Organisational and report writing skills.
- Flexibility and problem-solving skills, to deal effectively with unexpected challenges.

2.2. Employing accredited agents and assistants

Accredited agents and assistants do not need the same level of skills and experience as a 'named' ecologist. Employment as an accredited agent or assistant can be viewed as training to becoming a 'named' ecologist on a EPS mitigation licence. An accredited agent is expected to have wider

experience than an assistant, who should work under the supervision of the 'named' ecologist or the accredited agent. The 'named' ecologist should decide on the necessary level of supervision, depending on the significance and complexity of the task. Constant on-site supervision is not necessary for simple tasks. It is the responsibility of the 'named' ecologist to ensure anyone they employ as either an accredited agent or assistant has the appropriate skills and experience relevant for the particular task/s. Natural England does not require evidence of accredited agent or assistant skills or experience, but as a guide, each should have the following:

Accredited agent key skills

- Identification, survey and handling under own licence .
- Understanding of newt ecology
- Basic knowledge of legislation and licensing process
- Understanding of welfare issues
- Record keeping
- Understanding of great crested newt Habitat Suitability Index
- Understanding of implementing mitigation schemes
- Good working knowledge of construction practices

Assistant key skills

- Identification and survey methods
- Welfare issues
- Basic knowledge of newt ecology
- Basic handling (if being appointed under a mitigation licence – see below).
- Basic knowledge of construction practices
- Record keeping
- Basic knowledge of implementing mitigation schemes

2.3. Assistants and Great crested newts

Natural England recognises that it is not always commercially sustainable for consultancies to always employ licensed staff to inspect pitfall traps on a daily basis and relocate any animals captured. It is our view that provided the assistants, be they the developer's own 'site staff' or the consultancies 'field workers', receive appropriate species training, including handling and welfare issues, the risk of harm to Great crested newts is likely to be low and that they may undertake the task unsupervised.

Therefore, Natural England has placed a set of standard conditions on mitigation licences that will **only** apply to Great crested newt licences and will authorise the 'named' ecologist on the licence **to appoint persons, in writing, to specifically undertake the limited task of inspecting pitfall traps and/or artificial refugia (e.g. carpet tiles) and to remove and relocate any captured animals either to the other side of the exclusion fencing or to the designated receptor site(s)** as agreed in the Method Statement. It is recommended that the authorised assistants carry their letter of authorisation at all times whilst undertaking the task of inspecting pitfall traps.

We have decided that this policy should apply only to Great crested newts and not other EPS, in particular bats. This is because the risk of harm to bats is significantly increased due to the 'fragility' of the species during handling and the specific needs during release to avoid harm being caused. We are also mindful of the potential risk of disease transmission from bat to human.

3. Gaining experience

The following are examples of ways of obtaining experience in working with amphibians and great crested newts in particular:

- Attend training courses, such as those run by the Institute of Ecologists and Environmental Managers (IEEM), Field Studies Council (FSC), The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT), the Wildlife Trusts (WTs)
- Work as an accredited agent or assistant on a variety of mitigation schemes
- Work as a volunteer for a local Amphibian and Reptile Group, Froglife, The Pond Conservation Trust, a County Wildlife Trust or another conservation organisation

4. Refereeing for a prospective 'named' ecologist

Two references are needed for ecologists who have not previously held a great crested newt licence for a mitigation scheme or been a 'named' ecologist under the current licensing procedure, and those who have not held a mitigation licence in the last 3 years.

References need not be lengthy but should contain sufficient, specific information to support the prospective 'named' ecologist's experience in relation to the proposed scheme.

In general, a referee should hold relevant great crested newt licences (e.g. survey and mitigation) and have worked on mitigation projects with the person applying to be a 'named' ecologist, or be able to vouch for their competence. A brief outline of the referee's own great crested newt experience should be included and the length of time he/she has known the prospective 'named' ecologist in relation to work with great crested newts. At least one referee must have held a great crested newt mitigation licence in the last three years.

As mitigation schemes vary in complexity, the referee should be satisfied that the prospective 'named' ecologist has the necessary skills for a range of projects. Adequate survey experience, including experience of bottle and pit-fall trapping to ensure high welfare standards, is particularly relevant.

If the referee has worked with the prospective 'named' ecologist on other mitigation projects, brief details of the mitigation methods and level of responsibility held by the prospective 'named' ecologist are needed. It may

be that the prospective 'named' ecologist has worked as an assistant or accredited agent under other licences and has gained experience in areas such as project management or the designing of mitigation schemes. EPSL or EPSM reference numbers for licences which the named ecologist has worked on should be provided wherever possible.

If the prospective 'named' ecologist, has attended any relevant training courses these should also be mentioned.

In order to determine whether a prospective named ecologist is suitably experienced, the wildlife adviser assessing an application will assess the information provided by the prospective named ecologist in the application form; the supporting information provided by referees; and the quality and standard of the method statement. Where the information indicates a lack of experience, or fails to demonstrate the level of experience required (see table above), a Further Information Request will be issued requesting more information is provided or that an more experienced ecologist applies for the licence.

Further reading

English Nature (now Natural England), 2001. Great crested newt mitigation guidelines

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/naturalenglandshop/UserFiles/Files/newt1.pdf>

Oldham, RS, Keeble, J, Swan, MJS & Jeffcote, M, 2000 Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). *Herpetological Journal*: 10(4): 142-155

Gent, A.H., & Gibson, S.D., eds. 1998. *Herpetofauna Workers' Manual*. Peterborough, Joint Nature Conservation Committee