



# NatureSpace Licensing Schemes Monitoring Results 2021-2025

JANUARY 2026



# Summary

**The NatureSpace licensing schemes offer a strategic alternative to traditional great crested newt compensation. They allow development to progress without delay, with impacts offset through the advance delivery of high-quality great crested newt habitat at suitable locations.**

The schemes are funded entirely through developer contributions (there is no taxpayer funding). This supports habitat creation, 25-year management agreements with landowners and a robust, long-term monitoring programme. The Newt Conservation Partnership (NCP) is the sole delivery body, working with local planning authorities, infrastructure providers, landowners and contractors. Delivery is supported by the close involvement of two conservation NGOs – Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Freshwater Habitats Trust – which provide technical expertise and evidence-led input across the schemes.

Monitoring results from 2021 to 2025 show that the schemes are delivering consistently strong outcomes for great crested newt – performing well above regional and national benchmarks. Results are particularly strong at mature compensation sites (four years old or more). Ninety per cent of mature sites and 76% of mature ponds were occupied by great crested newt, far higher than levels recorded in comparable regional and national monitoring programmes. This success is driven by habitat quality: 93% of ponds achieved Good or Excellent Habitat Suitability Index scores, highlighting the benefits of focusing on well-designed, high-quality breeding and terrestrial habitat.

Delivery is local or regional and strategically planned. Compensation sites are located near existing newt populations and within Strategic Opportunity Areas, supporting Local Nature Recovery Strategies and ensuring that gains are delivered in the same landscapes where development impacts occur. By combining spatial modelling, expert site selection and on-the-ground assessment, the schemes increase the chances of natural newt colonisation and support long-term population resilience.

Although the schemes are designed specifically to compensate for impacts on great crested newt, monitoring shows that high-quality pond creation and restoration delivers substantial wider benefits. Most waterbodies qualify as Priority Ponds, and many support regionally and nationally threatened wetland plants and animals. This provides evidence that a focus on newt-friendly habitat can also make a meaningful contribution to wider nature recovery.

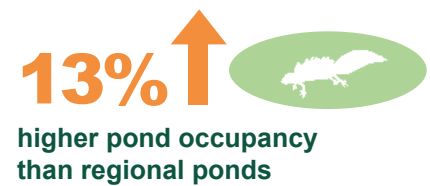
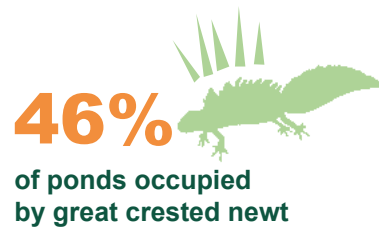
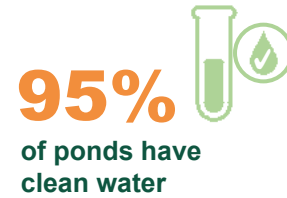
Overall, the results show that this commercial-NGO partnership is working exceptionally well. By bringing private finance, technical expertise and local delivery together, the NatureSpace licensing schemes are improving outcomes for great crested newt at landscape scale, while providing a practical, evidence-based solution that supports both development and regional nature recovery.

**Fig. 1.** Two new ponds that have just been created at a compensation site in Staffordshire as part of a network of 10 ponds.



# NatureSpace Licensing Schemes Monitoring Results 2021-2025

This report presents the NatureSpace licensing schemes 2021-2025 monitoring results from compensation habitats delivered by the Newt Conservation Partnership.



These results show how NatureSpace's licensing schemes are:

- Creating high-quality habitats for great crested newt
- Outperforming regional and national benchmarks
- Restoring clean water to the countryside
- Delivering measurable gains for wider freshwater wildlife

## Delivering a positive outcome for great crested newt

**Dr Pascale Nicolet**

*CEO, Newt Conservation Partnership  
and Technical Director, Freshwater Habitats Trust*



2025 has been a challenging year for great crested newt conservation. Despite uncertainty due to proposed changes to national planning policy and one of the most severe droughts on record, we have stayed focused on what matters – delivering strategically located, clean water ponds and high-quality terrestrial habitat to ensure a positive outcome for great crested newt.

Our 2025 monitoring results show that this approach is working. In total 90% of our mature sites have been colonised by great crested newt. We are also seeing rapid benefits for other freshwater wildlife, with rare plants and Priority species colonising new and restored ponds.

I am proud to be involved in this scheme, which demonstrates a successful collaboration between a nature-focused commercial organisation – NatureSpace Partnership, the environmental NGO community, local planning authorities and a wide range of landowners. We all benefit from the lack of red tape, high ambition for on-the-ground conservation and a focus on local delivery. With our schemes, we ensure compensation sites are well managed and landowners supported for the long term.

For more details about our work on the ground please read the case studies (pages 21-25).

## Newt Conservation Partnership – our focus

NCP is a community benefit society and is the sole delivery body for NatureSpace’s District and Organisational Licensing schemes. Ahead of any impacts, we create and restore clean water ponds and high-quality terrestrial habitat for great crested newt to compensate for habitat lost or degraded by development.

The schemes finance all our work, including habitat delivery and long-term management and monitoring. This means we do not rely on any form of grant or taxpayer funding.

Our objective is simple: to improve the conservation status of great crested newt in the regions in which we operate.

For more information about the NatureSpace licensing schemes, please visit:

[www.naturespaceuk.com](http://www.naturespaceuk.com)

## Expertise from Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Freshwater Habitats Trust

NCP applies best practice principles to drive high-quality compensation habitat delivery. We work in close collaboration with two national conservation charities: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Freshwater Habitats Trust – drawing on their expertise in amphibian ecology, aquatic and terrestrial habitat design and management and freshwater science.

Our compensation sites are carefully selected using a robust spatial model alongside existing great crested newt records, to locate new habitats close to existing populations or in strategic locations that enhance landscape connectivity. Before habitat creation or restoration takes place, NCP Project Officers carry out detailed on-the-ground assessments of substrate, hydrology, water quality and surrounding land use. This careful preparation helps ensure that ponds remain clean, resilient and valuable for wildlife over the long term.

For more information, please visit: [www.arc-trust.org](http://www.arc-trust.org) and [www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](http://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

## Ensuring local wildlife gain in areas where development impacts are being felt

**Dr Tom Tew** | *CEO, NatureSpace Partnership*



This report shows how successful our licensing schemes have been for great crested newts and other wildlife, and it is these outcomes that inspire and motivate everyone at NatureSpace. But I’d also like to mention specifically how well the scheme is working for two critical stakeholder groups – the local authorities who administer the District Licensing scheme and the developers who use it.

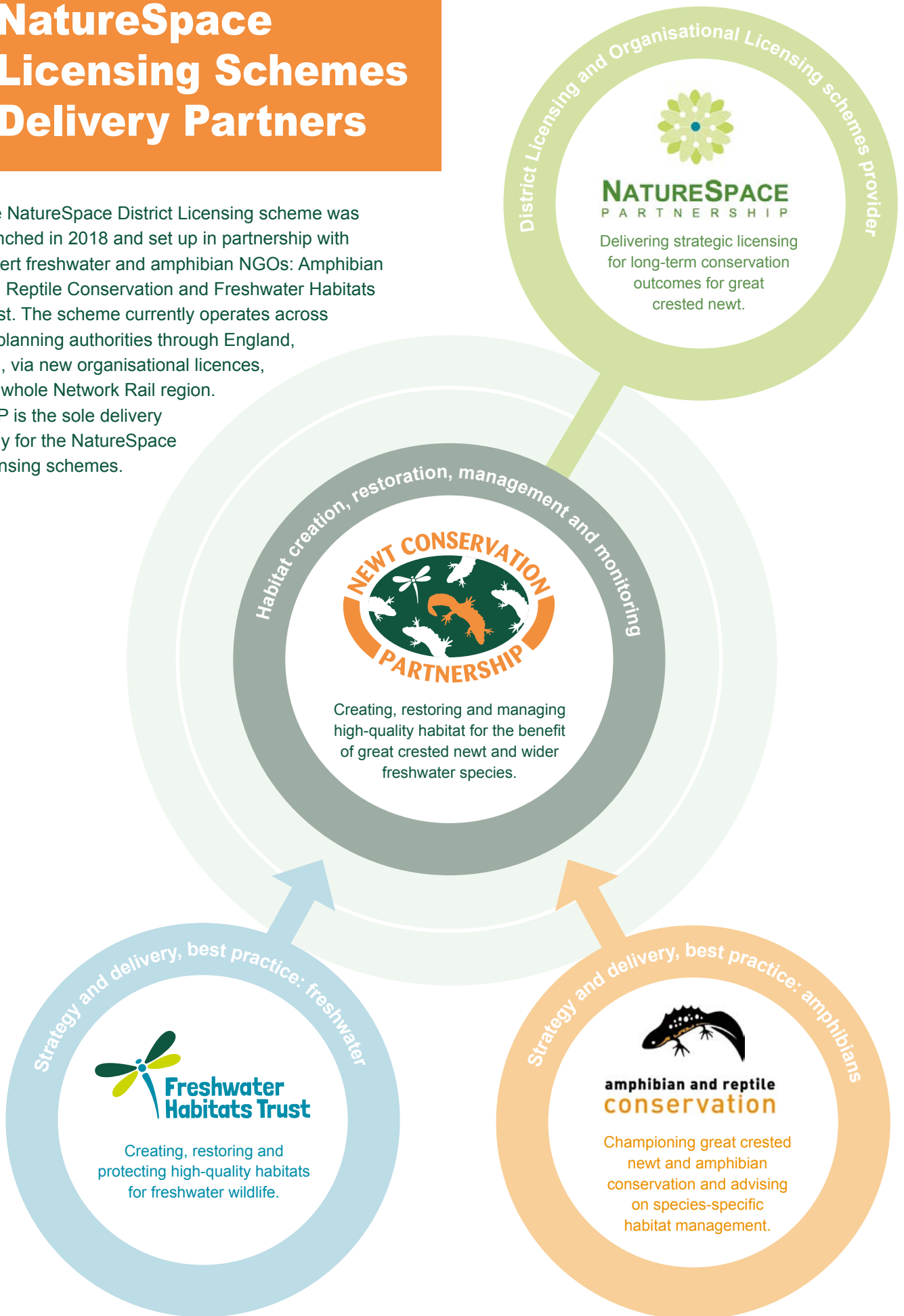
Without our local authority partners the scheme simply would not work – it is they who integrate species licensing with the planning system and it is this which makes District Licensing uniquely and powerfully attractive to developers, because they know that it satisfies all their legal and planning requirements. The scheme also saves local authorities time and money, and helps them meet their statutory obligations but, above all, it ensures local delivery of wildlife gain in the same areas where the impacts are being felt.

For developers, of course, the District Licensing scheme de-risks their development in a cost-effective and legally certain way, but again it also provides them with the strongest and most accountable sustainable development credentials, thanks largely to the excellent monitoring procedures and results which are reported here. Over 95% of developers would use the District Licensing scheme again, and infrastructure providers have told us that Organisational Licensing saves 90% of the costs of the traditional licensing system.

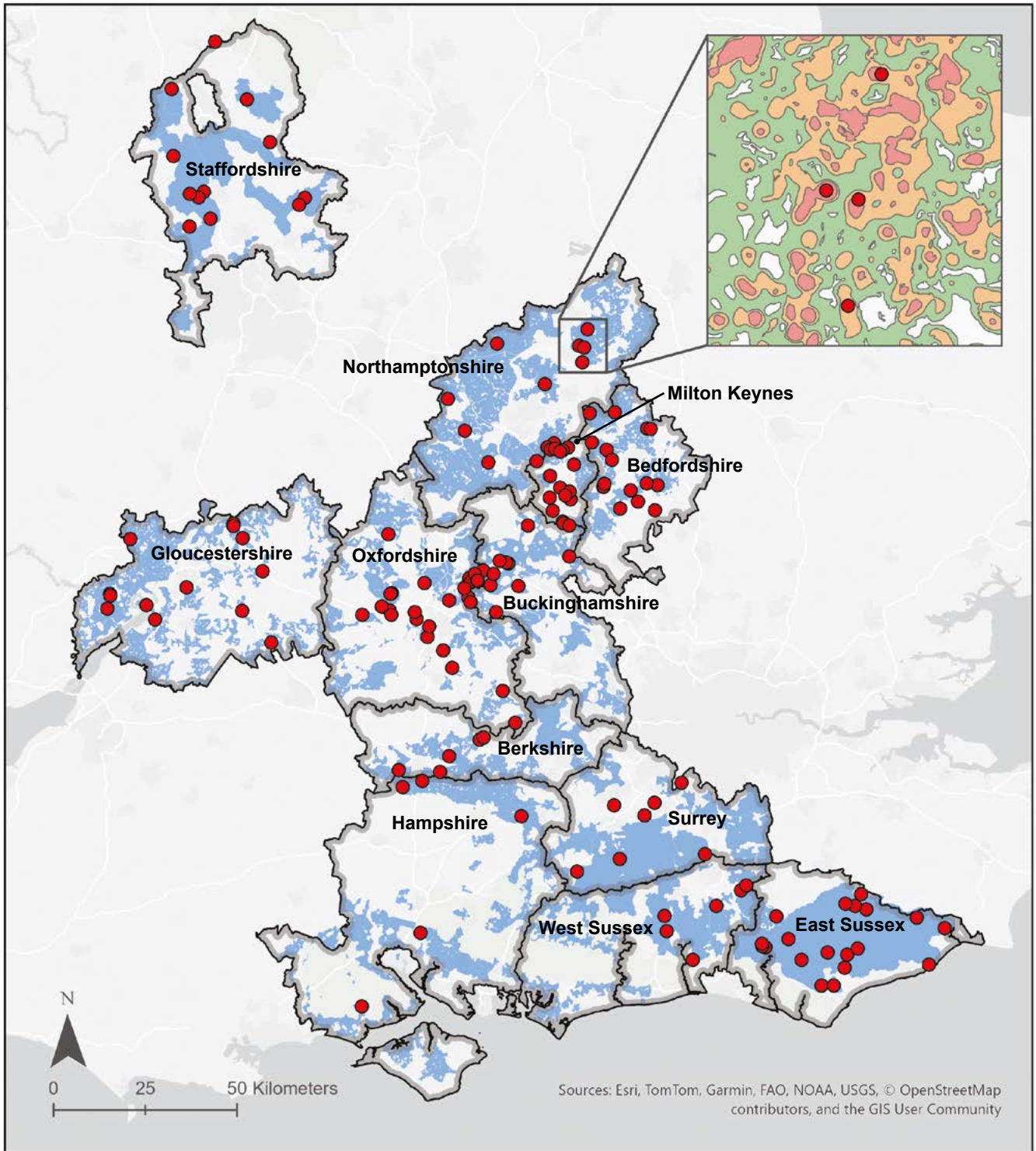


# NatureSpace Licensing Schemes Delivery Partners

The NatureSpace District Licensing scheme was launched in 2018 and set up in partnership with expert freshwater and amphibian NGOs: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Freshwater Habitats Trust. The scheme currently operates across 70 planning authorities through England, and, via new organisational licences, the whole Network Rail region. NCP is the sole delivery body for the NatureSpace licensing schemes.



**Fig. 2.** The NatureSpace District Licensing and Organisational Licensing schemes are regulated by Natural England. The NatureSpace schemes are different to ‘District Level Licensing’ which is operated by Natural England directly.



**Fig. 3.** Map of NCP compensation sites created under the NatureSpace District Licensing scheme between 2018 and 2025, showing Strategic Opportunity Areas (SOAs). Some regions have fewer compensation sites than others depending on when local planning authorities joined the scheme and how much compensation habitat has been required due to development.

# Compensation Delivery – District Licensing Scheme

Between February 2018 and December 2025, NCP has created or restored 490 ponds and provided more than 1600 hectares of suitable terrestrial habitat for the NatureSpace District Licensing scheme.

Working across 11 counties, we have 172 compensation sites across participating local planning authorities (Fig. 3). The number of compensation sites varies between regions depending when local planning authorities joined the scheme and the level of development impacts on great crested newt habitat in that area.

Increasing the density of clean water ponds in the landscape is key to reversing the loss of breeding ponds for great crested newt. That is why we focus on adding new ponds through creation. Where we can restore clean water and the terrestrial habitat is of high quality, we also carry out pond restoration, including reinstating 'ghost' ponds<sup>1</sup>. This approach is already delivering very positive results on the ground, as shown by the Wadhurst Estate case study in Sussex (page 23).



Fig. 4. A male great crested newt.

## Pond compensation

Up to December 2025, compensation requirement for District Licensing stood at 277 ponds and we delivered 490, 213 ponds more than required (Fig. 5).

All NatureSpace licensing schemes require that compensation habitat is secured in advance of impacts by developers. This means we always need to have sufficient habitat in reserve to be able to quickly provide compensation – our habitat bank. By working in advance of compensation requirements and creating a habitat bank, the scheme can meet the needs of developers at short notice for both aquatic and terrestrial habitat.

For each occupied pond lost to development, we create or restore at least four high-quality compensation ponds, a 4:1 gain to loss ratio. For degraded ponds, we work to a 2:1 ratio, replacing those impacted by development with two new clean water ponds. The NatureSpace licensing schemes also provide compensation for temporary impacts to ponds at a 1:1 ratio.

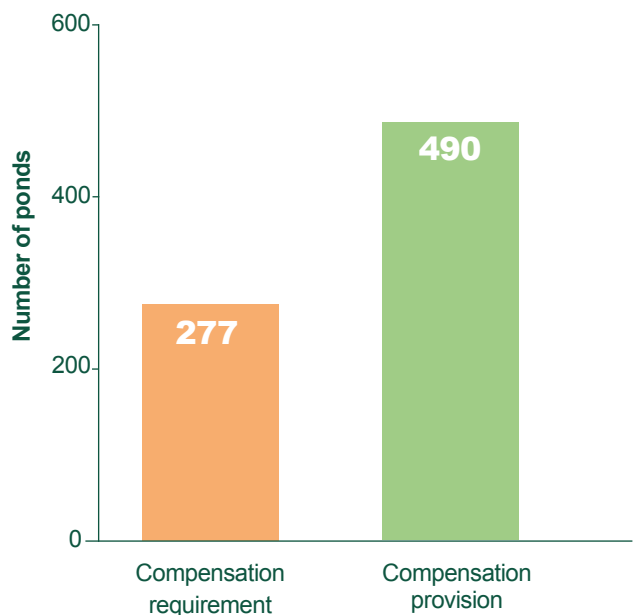
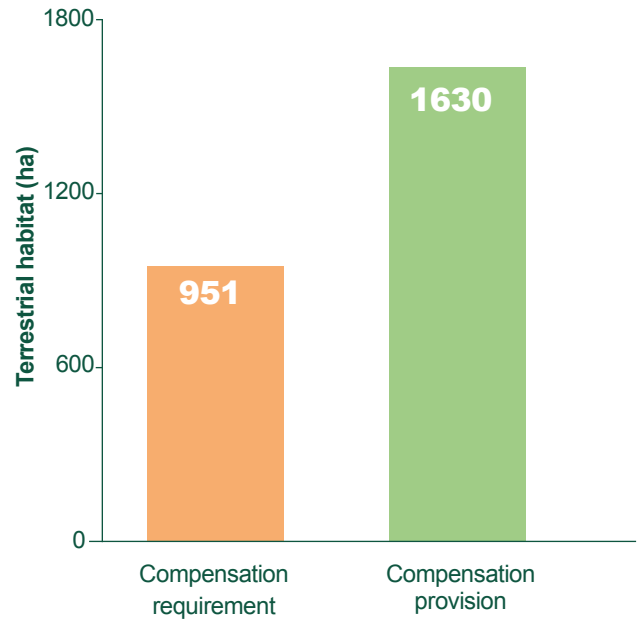


Fig. 5. Aquatic habitat compensation requirements to address development impacts on great crested newt and compensation provision for District Licensing up to December 2025, showing a habitat bank of 213 ponds.

## The value of terrestrial compensation

Great crested newts spend most of their life on land, generally only returning to ponds to breed in spring. Newts are found in a variety of terrestrial habitats where they hide and feed, including tussocky grassland, woodland, hedges, scrub and habitat mosaics. This is why the NatureSpace licensing schemes also provide terrestrial habitat compensation. Working to a 1:1 ratio for terrestrial loss or damage due to development, we have provided 1630 hectares of terrestrial habitat for great crested newt, creating a habitat bank of 679 hectares above the 951 hectares required by the District Licensing scheme (Fig. 6).

Terrestrial habitat for great crested newt can often be created on the wettest or least productive parts of a landholding. For landowners, this provides a positive use for these areas, with a reliable income and long-term management funded through the schemes. From a conservation perspective, low productivity grass or arable land can be converted to species-rich grassland or habitat mosaics that benefit a wide range of plants and animals. By working with multiple landowners at a landscape scale the schemes also help to create networks of high-quality habitat that improve ecological connectivity (Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border case study, page 21).



**Fig. 6.** Terrestrial habitat compensation requirements to address development impacts on great crested newt and compensation provision for District Licensing up to December 2025, showing a habitat bank of 679 hectares.



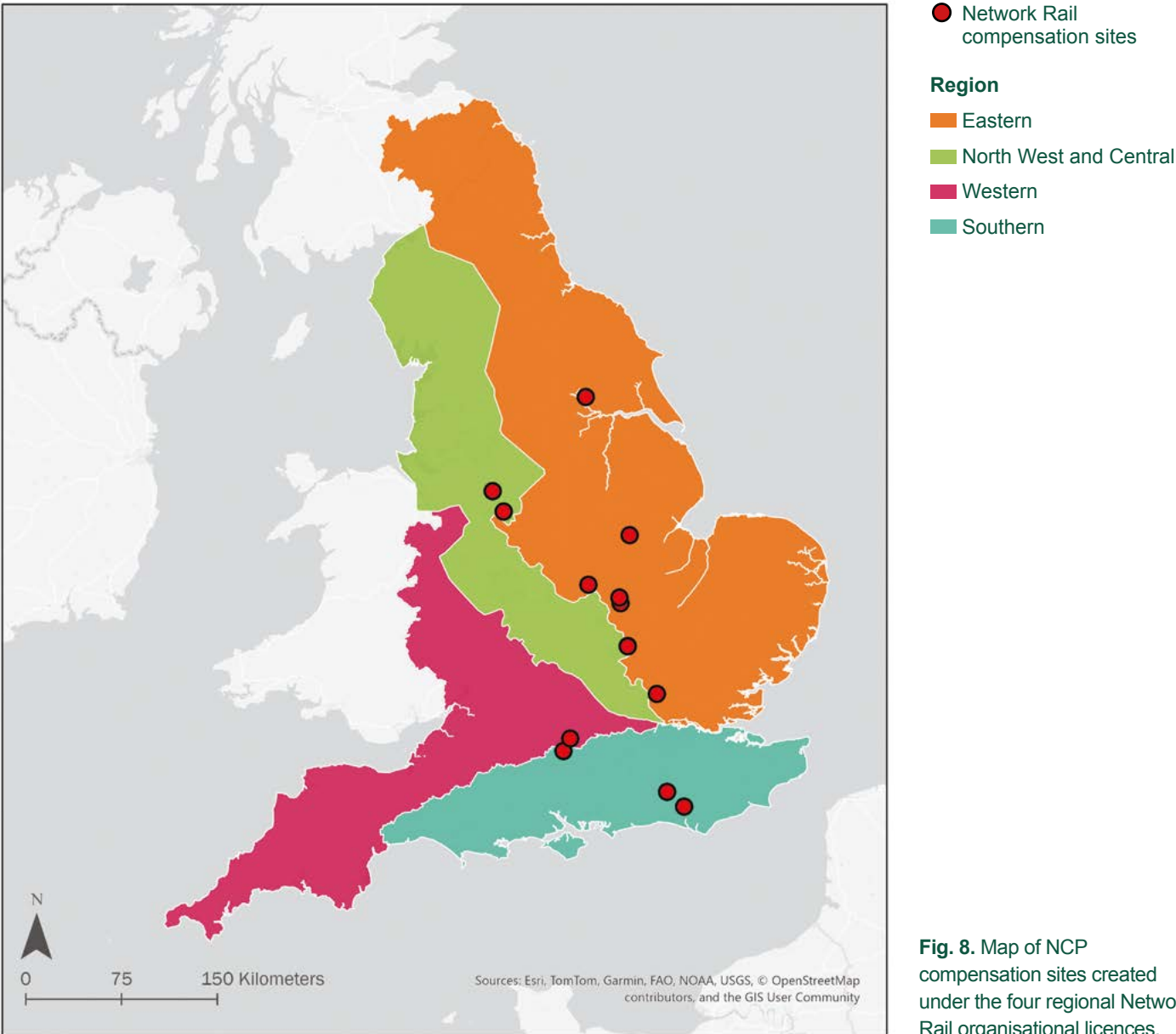
**Fig. 7.** A pond complex that has just been created in rewilded farmland in Bedfordshire.

# Compensation Delivery – Network Rail Organisational Licences

Since 2024, all four Network Rail operational regions in England have had an organisational licence secured by NatureSpace (Fig. 8). Impacts on great crested newt arising from infrastructure upgrades or maintenance operations, including routine maintenance, are all covered by the licences, saving considerable time and money for this large infrastructure organisation. As with District Licensing, Organisational Licensing is simple and quick to use. This enables short notice upgrades or operations with potential impacts on great crested newt to proceed without delay. This is made possible because NCP

always has a habitat bank with more aquatic or terrestrial habitat than is needed by the scheme.

Up to 2025, NCP has created or restored 30 clean water ponds and provided 84 hectares of terrestrial habitat at 13 compensation sites under the Network Rail organisational licences. This includes compensation sites outside of the District Licensing area, for example in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Leicestershire. A case study of one of the Network Rail compensation sites, Colney Heath in Hertfordshire, is included on page 25.



**Fig. 8.** Map of NCP compensation sites created under the four regional Network Rail organisational licences.

## Monitoring Programme Aims



### Great Crested Newt Benefits

Monitor great crested newt colonisation of created or restored habitats, assess habitat quality and gather data for Favourable Conservation Status evaluation.



### Regulatory Compliance

Adhere to Natural England's guidelines to ensure scheme compliance.



### Regional Occupancy Trends

Assess great crested newt presence and pond quality in pre-existing ponds.



### Wider Biodiversity Benefits

Collect additional biological and environmental data to assess the wider biodiversity benefits of the schemes.

## Field Methods



### eDNA

Environmental DNA (eDNA) is DNA that is released by organisms into the environment. It can be used to detect the presence of great crested newts in ponds.



### Population Size Class Assessment

Survey methods include bottle trapping and torching. Used to assess population status of great crested newt.



### HSI

The Habitat Suitability Index is a numerical index which represents the potential of a habitat to support great crested newt.



### Wetland Plant Surveys

Assess wetland plant diversity and Priority status of ponds using the standardised National Pond Survey method.

## Monitoring project outcomes on an ecologically realistic timescale

### Emeritus Professor Richard Griffiths

*Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent, Trustee of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Director, Newt Conservation Partnership*



A major challenge in the conservation of amphibians is understanding how they move around and colonise new and restored habitats. This type of work cannot be done on short-term grants, and, for the first time, the District Licensing scheme for great crested newts has created an opportunity to get a handle on this problem using timeframes and the landscape scales that are needed. The fact that great crested newts are now found at 90% of mature compensation sites and that 76% of mature ponds are now occupied is a result that I would not have predicted as being possible when the scheme started just over seven years ago. This just shows how deploying the scientific and practical expertise of the project partners can be used to achieve rapid results.

The commitment of landowners to manage ponds for 25 years provides a unique opportunity to continue monitoring the project outcomes on an ecologically realistic timescale. This in turn will improve our understanding of how to ensure that great crested newts can persist in landscapes subject to increasing pressures from habitat degradation and climate change.

## Case Study

# Population Monitoring at Rushbeds Wood

**LPA:** Buckinghamshire Council

**Number of ponds:** Two

**Land use:** Nature reserve with a mixture of woodland and meadow habitats

**Rushbeds Wood in Buckinghamshire is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) owned and managed by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).**



**Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
& Oxfordshire  
Wildlife Trust**

The woodland reserve is a surviving fragment of the historic Bernwood Forest and is of particular interest for rare butterflies, which benefit from conservation management and wide woodland rides. The site has heavy clay soils, often waterlogged, which makes it ideal for pond creation. To add to the existing network of small ponds in the woods and increase breeding habitat for great crested newts, known to be present at Rushbeds Wood, NCP created two clean water ponds in the reserve in November 2018 to compensate for developer impacts in Buckinghamshire.

Rushbeds Wood is one of 12 NCP compensation sites where we currently conduct population assessment surveys<sup>2</sup> every three years, comprising a maximum of six visits from March until June. We use standard torching and bottle trapping methods. We survey both the new NCP compensation ponds and two pre-existing ponds within a 500-metre radius to assess population status at site level.

The first population assessment survey took place in 2019, just five months after the ponds were created. Unsurprisingly, we did not record any great crested newts in the newly created compensation ponds. At the two pre-existing ponds, we recorded a peak count (the most in one single visit) of six great crested newt individuals.

In 2025, the population had markedly increased in the new ponds, with a peak count of 23 individuals recorded. We also observed both eggs and larvae, confirming that both compensation ponds are providing breeding habitat for great crested newts. The peak count was lower in the pre-existing ponds with nine individuals recorded.

This is encouraging and suggests that the newly created ponds at Rushbeds Wood are maturing well. NCP will continue to assess great crested newt population status every three years at this site, contributing to a better understanding of new pond colonisation by this species, and helping inform future management.





**Fig. 9.** One of two clean water ponds at Rushbeds Wood SSSI in Buckinghamshire, a Wildlife Trust reserve.

# Monitoring Results


The results presented here include findings from the 2025 monitoring programme together with an analysis of data collected between 2021 and 2025. Including the multi-year analysis is important because great crested newt occupancy can vary naturally from year to year: examining results over several years provides a more reliable assessment of the conservation success of the schemes.

## 2025 headlines


**31%**   
of ponds occupied  
by great crested newt

**93%**   
of ponds have a Habitat  
Suitability Index score  
of Excellent or Good

## 2021-2025 multi-year headlines

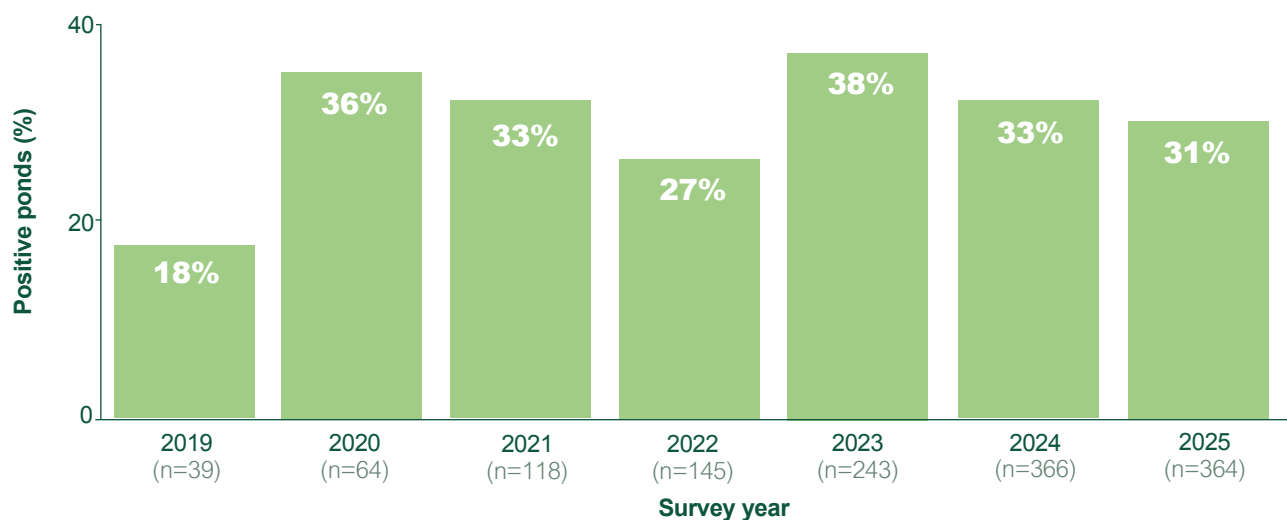
**46%**   
of ponds occupied  
by great crested newt

**96%**   
of ponds have a Habitat  
Suitability Index score  
of Excellent or Good

**90%**   
of mature sites occupied  
by great crested newt

## Pond occupancy in 2025

Of the 364 NCP compensation ponds surveyed in 2025, 31% were occupied by great crested newt. This is a high proportion compared to pond occupancy at regional and national levels. Occupancy was 2% lower in 2025 than in 2024 (Fig. 10). This mirrors a similar occupancy dip seen in regional and national data from the wider countryside, suggesting weather or metapopulation driven variation, rather than a change in habitat quality. In addition, 60% of ponds surveyed in 2025 were only one to two years old making it likely that limited time for colonisation also contributed to slightly lower occupancy in 2025.

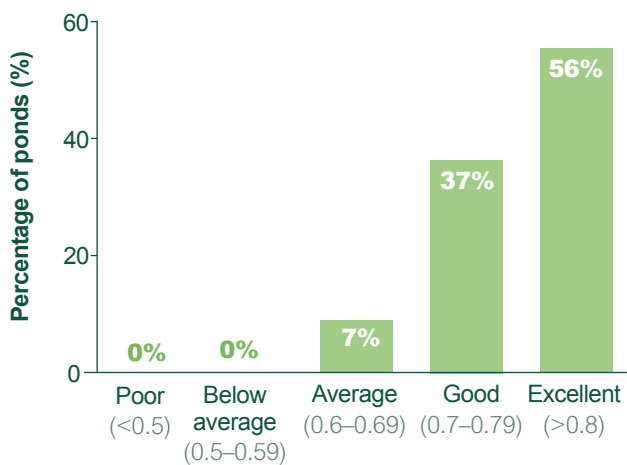


**Fig. 10.** Percentage of NCP compensation ponds occupied by great crested newt since the monitoring programme began in 2019. In brackets: number of ponds surveyed.

## Habitat quality of compensation ponds in 2025

The Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) is a standard tool used to assess whether ponds provide suitable conditions for great crested newt<sup>3</sup>, and is one of the key measures reported to the regulator, Natural England.

In 2025, habitat quality across compensation ponds was consistently high. Ninety-three per cent of ponds achieved HSI scores classed as either Good or Excellent indicating that the vast majority are providing suitable conditions for great crested newt. The small proportion of ponds scoring Average were all very young sites that are still developing and are expected to improve as they mature (Fig. 11).



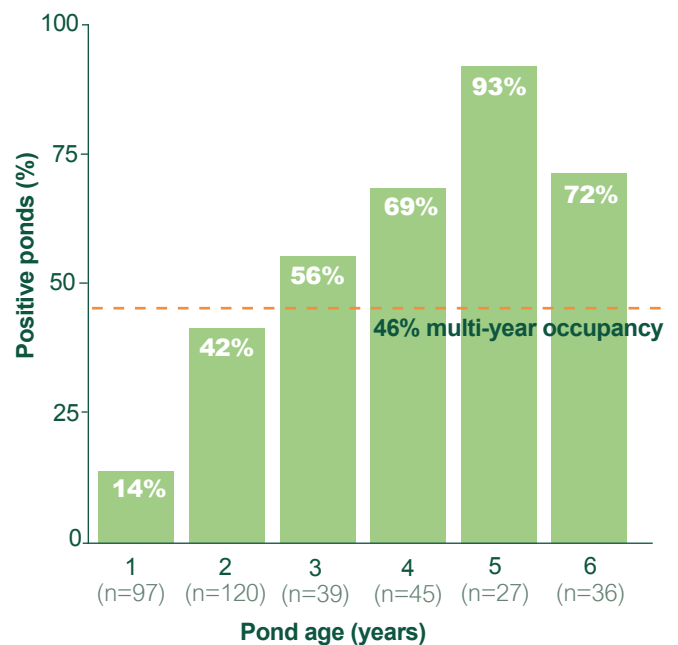
**Fig. 11.** HSI categories for NCP compensation ponds monitored in 2025. Ponds with a Good or Excellent score provide more suitable habitats for great crested newt than ponds with lower scores.

## Pond occupancy over the last five years (2021-2025)

Evidence from long-term great crested newt monitoring schemes, such as the national PondNet programme<sup>4</sup> and NCP’s South Midland landscape-scale monitoring (page 14) shows that great crested

newt pond occupancy varies annually, influenced by factors such as weather conditions and natural metapopulation dynamics. Some ponds are occupied every year, some never, but for the majority of occupied ponds, newt presence varies year on year. For the multi-year analysis, a pond is considered occupied if great crested newt presence is recorded at least once during the most recent five-year period.

Pond age is also an important factor affecting pond occupancy. Ponds that have been in the landscape longer are more likely to be better established, with more wetland plants for egg-laying and a greater abundance of invertebrate prey. Hence, while the overall multi-year occupancy for all ponds was 46%, mature compensation ponds, four years or older, had more than 69% occupancy (Fig. 12).



**Fig. 12.** Percentage of NCP compensation ponds with at least one great crested newt record over a five-year period (2021-2025), by pond age. In brackets: number of ponds for each age group.

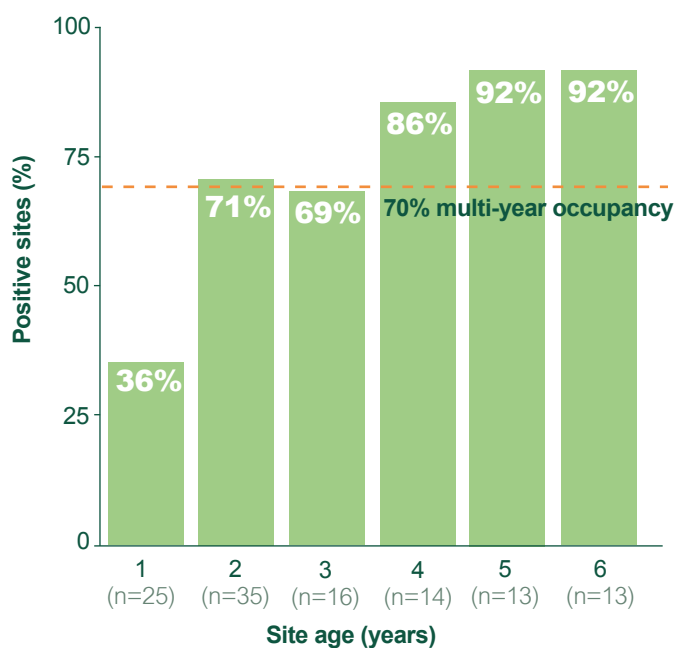
**Fig. 13.** A newly created pond for the Network Rail Eastern Organisational Licence, adjacent to Skipwith Common National Nature Reserve, Yorkshire.



## Site occupancy over the last five years (2021-2025)

NCP aims to create sites with clusters and networks of ponds (rather than just single ponds), in order to better support great crested newt metapopulations. Different ponds have different characteristics (depth, size, vegetation, substrate), which means some will suit newts better in one year than in another – and at least a few ponds should be available for breeding in each year.

Overall, 70% of the compensation sites have now been occupied at least once by great crested newt in the last five years (Fig. 14). At our more mature sites (four years or older), multi-year occupancy was over 86%. Together, these results suggest that the NCP network-based approach is highly effective: sustaining unusually high levels of site occupancy, particularly once habitats have had time to mature.



**Fig. 14.** Percentage of NCP compensation sites with at least one great crested newt record over a five-year period (2021-2025), by site age. In brackets: number of sites for each age group.

**Fig. 15.** The creation of a complex of five clean water ponds in progress at a Hampshire site, here removing topsoil for archaeological investigations. NCP will also restore the grassland and plant hedges and trees to create a mosaic of habitats which will benefit great crested newt and many other plants and animals. The landowner will receive annual payments to manage the site for wildlife for at least 25 years.



# Landscape-scale Monitoring Comparing Regional and National Datasets

To understand how well the NatureSpace schemes are performing, we need to compare great crested newt presence in NCP compensation ponds with presence in ponds across the wider countryside. This provides a background level of occupancy against which scheme outcomes can be fairly assessed.



**Fig. 16.** A comparison of great crested newt average pond occupancy percentages for NCP South Midlands ponds, existing regional and national ponds. We analysed datasets from 2019 to 2025, adjusting all occupancy data to remove cluster bias following the NARRS methodology<sup>5</sup>.

Two comparable datasets were used for this analysis. The regional survey (which forms part of the annual NatureSpace District Licensing monitoring programme) offered a direct comparison between 134 NCP compensation ponds and 172 existing countryside ponds located in the South Midlands area<sup>6</sup>. The national PondNet monitoring programme, which has assessed the status of great crested newt in England annually since 2015, provides a wider national context, with 407 ponds included in the national comparison. All surveys used the same methods, including eDNA to detect great crested newt presence and the Habitat Suitability Index to assess pond quality.

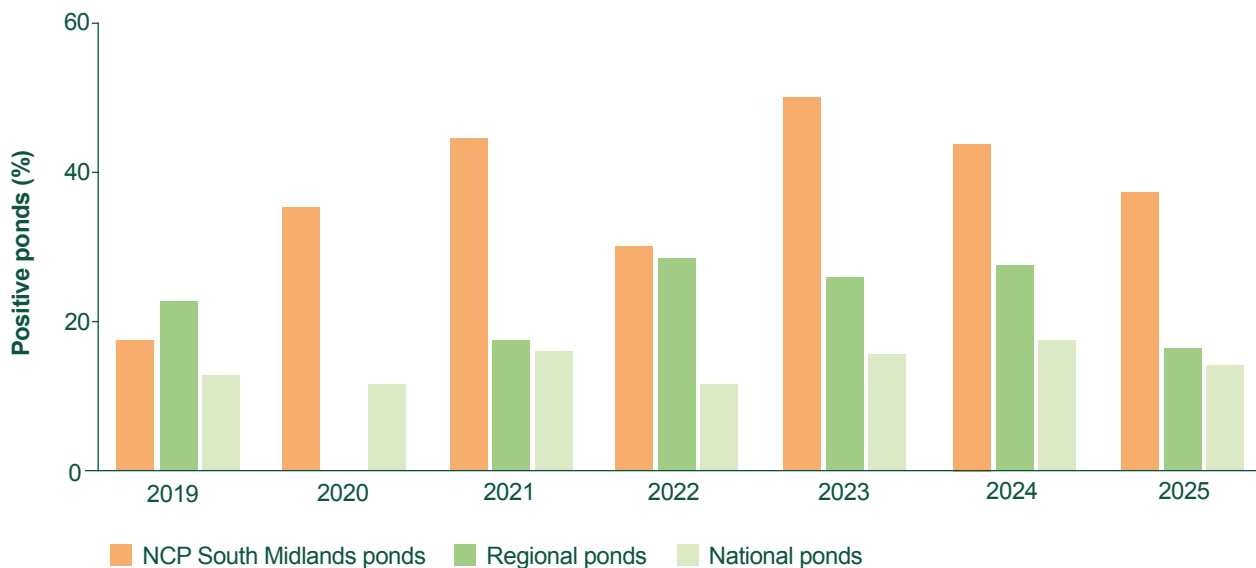
The results show that NCP compensation ponds outperform ponds in the wider landscape. On average, NCP South Midlands ponds have a 23% higher occupancy than the national average (Fig. 16). They also have a 13% higher newt occupancy than the regional ponds in the South Midlands. This higher level of occupancy has been recorded consistently since 2021 (Fig. 18), even though the Midlands is already an area with relatively high background newt presence.

Pond habitat quality for great crested newt shows a similar pattern. Ninety-one per cent of NCP ponds achieved HSI scores classed as Good or Excellent, compared with 35% of regional ponds and 37% of national ponds (Fig. 19).

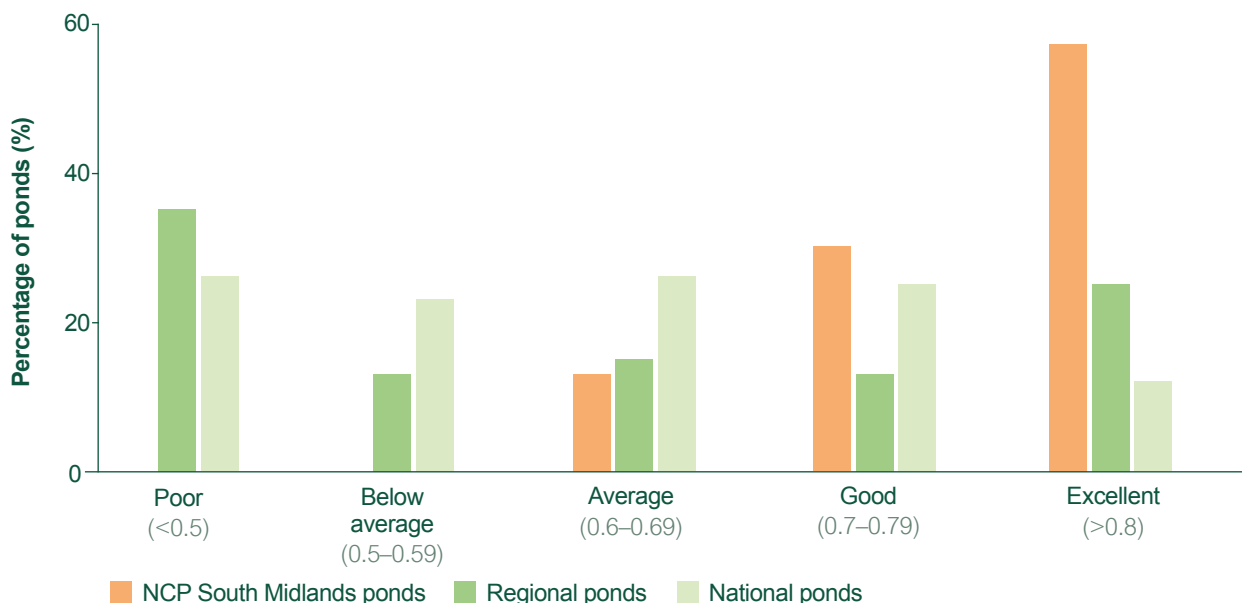


**Fig. 17.** An NCP Project Officer undertaking population assessment at a compensation site in Milton Keynes.

Together, these results show that NCP compensation ponds are both higher quality and more likely to be occupied by great crested newt than comparable ponds in the same landscape and nationally. The implication is that best-practice pond creation and restoration is driving improved outcomes.



**Fig. 18.** Great crested newt annual pond occupancy results for NCP South Midlands ponds created or restored, existing regional and national ponds. All occupancy data have been adjusted to remove cluster bias following the NARRS methodology. The regional survey did not take place in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Fig. 19.** Habitat Suitability Index results for NCP South Midlands ponds, pre-existing regional and national ponds. All data have been adjusted to remove cluster bias following the NARRS methodology.

## Monitoring against clear success measures

**Dr Tony Gent**

*CEO, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation  
and Director, Newt Conservation Partnership*



Good programmes don't just happen. The NatureSpace licensing schemes were collaboratively developed by a range of expert partners and built on a solid framework that considered both ecological and regulatory needs. This approach provided us with confidence that the schemes would succeed and that the benefits for great crested newt could be sustained into the future.

To demonstrate that the schemes are delivering real benefits for nature, a robust monitoring programme is required to check progress against clear success measures. The NatureSpace schemes deliver fully funded, long-term compliance, population, landscape and wider benefits monitoring. The latest monitoring results show that the habitats being created or restored are of a high quality and are being widely used by great crested newts. In addition, the long-term commitment to monitoring means that we can both track changes over time and ensure that the species continues to thrive in the years ahead.

# Wider Benefits Monitoring

Understanding how our work benefits wildlife beyond great crested newt is essential to assess the schemes' overall contribution to nature restoration. Now in its third year, wider biodiversity assessments are showing that NCP ponds are not just meeting regulatory requirements, but in many cases are becoming some of the highest-quality freshwater habitats in the landscape.

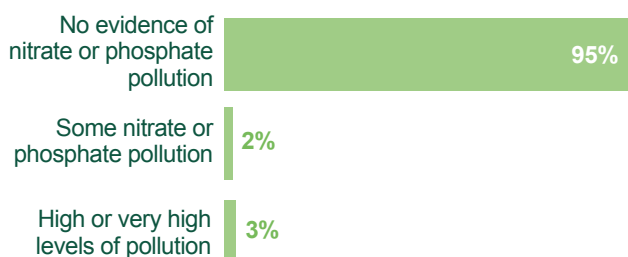
This analysis draws together data from multiple sources: great crested newt eDNA and population assessment surveys, targeted wetland plant surveys, water quality assessment and anecdotal records collected by NCP Project Officers.



## Clean water – the foundation of pond biodiversity

Nutrient pollution from phosphate and nitrate is one of the most pervasive pressures on freshwater habitats. Even low levels can fundamentally alter plant communities and reduce suitability for many specialist species. NCP uses rapid field methods to measure phosphate and nitrate, providing a simple but reliable indicator of water quality across large numbers of ponds<sup>7</sup>.

In 2025, NCP collected nutrient data for 330 compensation ponds. An exceptionally high number of these ponds (95%) showed no evidence of nitrate or phosphate pollution (Fig. 20). The few sites where elevated nutrients were detected were typically either very new, had not yet been colonised



**Fig. 20.** Water quality results for 330 NCP ponds surveyed in 2025 showing the high percentage of sites that were free from nutrient pollution. Rapid field testing of phosphate and nitrate is a widely used proxy for water pollution<sup>7</sup>.

by wetland plants or were in the process of drying due to the drought, temporarily concentrating nutrients through evaporation.

The high proportion of NCP ponds with clean water highlights our emphasis on careful site selection and design, particularly in agricultural and urban settings. By prioritising clean water inputs and buffering ponds from nutrient sources, our aim is that NCP ponds will be able to maintain good water quality and diverse freshwater communities for the long term.

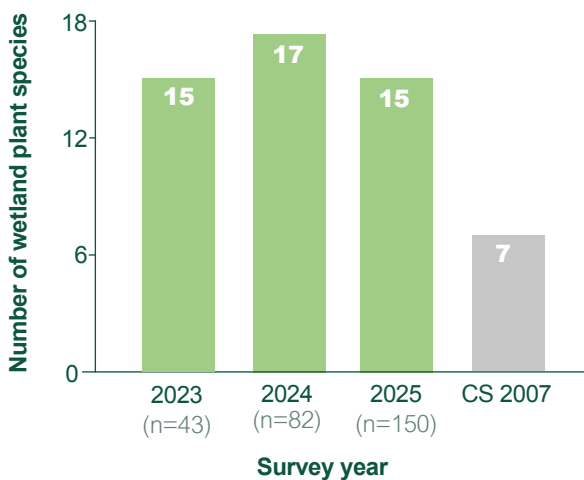
## Rich wetland plant communities

This year's surveys of the wetland plants present in NCP ponds show that they support an unusually wide range of species. A subset of 165 NCP ponds were surveyed in summer 2025 using the standardised National Pond Survey method<sup>8</sup>.

In total 137 wetland plant species were recorded from the 165 ponds. This is an exceptional number – representing well over a quarter of all wetland plants recorded in the UK. A surprisingly high proportion of submerged aquatic plants were found (29 species). This is important because aquatic species are at particular risk from water pollution and many are declining rapidly<sup>9</sup>. The plants recorded included nine stonewort species with more uncommon taxa such as pointed stonewort (*Nitella mucronata*) and clustered stonewort (*Tolypella glomerata*), together with a wide range of pondweeds (*Potamogeton* species) and water-crowfoots (*Ranunculus* species).

Ponds aged between two and six years supported an average of 15 wetland plant species, more than double that of countryside ponds<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 21). Species richness varied considerably, but many ponds were unusually rich (supporting up to 35 species) and seven ponds qualified as Priority habitats on the basis of their plant richness alone.

The richest plant communities were typically found in landscapes with extensive semi-natural land use and a high density of freshwaters, allowing natural dispersal. Lower richness was generally associated with young ponds or those affected by drought and the subsequent loss of submerged aquatic plants.



**Fig. 21.** Average species richness of NCP compensation ponds surveyed between 2023 and 2025 compared to wider countryside ponds (Countryside Survey 2007, CS 2007) data<sup>10</sup>. Only NCP compensation ponds older than one year at the time of survey are included. In brackets: number of ponds surveyed.

## A habitat for threatened wetland plants

Wetland plant national threat status was assessed using the England<sup>11</sup> and Great Britain<sup>12</sup> Red Lists. Regional rarity was considered in each vice-county, using rare plant registers or BSBI<sup>13</sup> data and liaison with county recorders.

Over half of the survey ponds (58%) supported at least one regionally or nationally threatened wetland plant species and nationally threatened species alone were recorded in more than a third of ponds. A particularly significant finding in 2025 was the discovery of a newly established population of lesser water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*; GB Endangered, England Vulnerable). This is now the third new NCP compensation pond in which this species has been recorded in an area where it had previously become extinct (case study on page 21).

Other highlights included the continued presence of the carnivorous plant greater bladderwort (*Utricularia*



**Fig. 22.** A toad waiting for new breeding habitat, a new pond, to be completed.

*vulgaris*) at two adjacent ponds in Buckinghamshire, representing only the second known location for this species in the county, the original site being a nature reserve around 5 km away. There were new sites too for the very uncommon red pondweed (*Potamogeton alpinus*; GB Vulnerable) which was present in five ponds in Northamptonshire, all in the vicinity of a known core population in Yardley Chase SSSI. The records for both of these species are significant because they show that it is possible to use high quality pond creation to help rare and declining species spread into the wider countryside.

The presence of so many rare plants in NCP ponds is especially important in the context of the serious and ongoing declines of many wetland plants. The recently published *A new vascular plant Red List for Great Britain*<sup>12</sup> shows that around a third of all wetland plant species are now threatened, largely due to pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation. Many other species have small or limited populations at the regional level and are at risk of local extinction.

The rapid colonisation of NCP compensation ponds by threatened plants demonstrates the added value of creating and restoring clean water ponds for great crested newt. By delivering high-quality habitat at scale, these ponds can be quickly colonised by wetland plants, helping to stem ongoing declines and reduce the risk of regional losses.

## Beyond plants – wider wildlife gains

The benefits of high-quality NCP compensation ponds clearly extend to other amphibians. Common toad (*Bufo bufo*), a Priority species undergoing

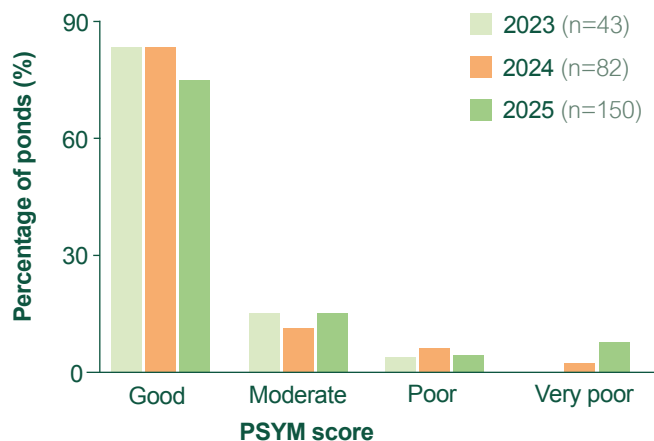
severe national declines<sup>14</sup>, was recorded at 43 ponds, including tadpole, juveniles and adults.

Undoubtedly the most exciting discovery in 2025 was a new population of pondweed leafhopper (*Erotettix cyane*) in Sussex. This beautiful, electric-blue coloured leafhopper is an exceptionally rare freshwater invertebrate in the UK, known from only a very small number of high-quality ponds in southern England and considered highly vulnerable due to its restricted distribution. Its presence again highlights the value of new NCP ponds for scarce and specialist species beyond great crested newt (case study on page 23).

## Ponds of high ecological quality

The overall quality of NCP ponds was assessed using PSYM<sup>15</sup> which integrates plant data to provide an ecological condition score. NCP ponds consistently outperformed countryside survey ponds<sup>10</sup>.

In 2025, three-quarters (75%) of NCP ponds aged two to six years achieved Good status, the highest PSYM category (Fig. 23). By comparison only 8% of countryside ponds achieved Good status<sup>10</sup>. NCP ponds scoring lower were typically those affected by drought or located in more urban or intensively managed landscapes. As with species richness, the 2025 results are in line with previous wetland plant surveys in 2023 and 2024 (Fig. 23) indicating consistent performance over time.



**Fig. 23.** PSYM results for NCP compensation ponds surveyed between 2023 and 2025. Only ponds older than one year at the time of survey are included in this graph. In brackets: number of ponds surveyed.

## Priority Pond status

Using all available biological data, over half of the 388 NCP compensation ponds (58%) are confirmed as Priority Ponds. However, not all ponds have been surveyed for every relevant biological group, so this does not represent a complete assessment.

To address this, clean water data and the predictive PASS analysis<sup>16</sup> were used to provisionally assess Priority Pond status where biological data were incomplete. When these additional lines of evidence are included, almost all NCP ponds (91%) have either confirmed or provisional Priority Pond status<sup>17</sup>.

## Delivering measurable gains for freshwater wildlife

**Professor Jeremy Biggs**

*Visiting Professor Oxford Brookes University; CEO, Freshwater Habitats Trust and Director, Newt Conservation Partnership*



We're all very encouraged by the great crested newt colonisation rates described in this year's monitoring report, but it is just as exciting to see the scheme's transformational effect on the wider landscape.

91% of ponds created and restored through the scheme are now classed as Priority Ponds or have been given provisional Priority Pond status – the national designation for the highest-quality ponds supporting exceptional freshwater wildlife. This year's surveys have, once again, uncovered some remarkable finds including the extremely uncommon lesser water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*) and pondweed leafhopper (*Erotettix cyane*). To reverse the decline in freshwater biodiversity, we need to think big by focusing on whole landscapes. By strategically creating and restoring ponds in carefully selected locations, the NatureSpace licensing schemes are extending and linking together existing biodiversity hotspots into a network of habitats for great crested newt and many other species.

The 2025 monitoring report confirms that the NatureSpace licensing schemes are punching well above their weight – delivering measurable gains for freshwater wildlife and making a significant contribution to nature recovery.

# Why the NatureSpace Schemes Work

## A strategic spatial strategy

To fulfil the schemes' requirements, compensation sites must be located either within 1 km of a recent great crested newt record and/or within high suitability habitat according to a great crested newt habitat suitability model. The model was developed with expert advice from partners Freshwater Habitats Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent. It is based on great crested newt occurrence data and a range of environmental variables. NatureSpace commissions new great crested newt surveys at regular intervals in order to update this landscape-scale model and integrate survey data from other sources, ensuring that spatial targeting remains robust and up to date.

At least 60% of NCP compensation sites need to be located within great crested newt SOAs as part of the schemes' requirements (Fig. 3). SOAs are underpinned by the model and are defined as areas where compensation sites are most likely to benefit great crested newt, i.e. where there is high habitat suitability and important great crested newt populations, maximising the likelihood of natural colonisation.

## Ground truthing and pre-investigations are essential

Monitoring results show that the NatureSpace schemes' spatial strategy is highly effective at steering our work to meet conservation objectives. Optimal site selection is further refined through ground observation during walkovers, and in some cases additional surveys looking for evidence of great crested newt presence, such as egg searches or eDNA surveys. To help great crested newt spread across the landscape, it is important that we create or restore clean water ponds outside SOAs, supporting more isolated or smaller great crested newt populations with stepping stone and breeding habitat, and reducing the risk of local extinction.

Ground-truthing is essential to tailor our compensation site plans to real-life site conditions and constraints. NCP's experienced Project Officers conduct walkovers to verify mapped features, assess soil type, hydrology, vegetation and existing wildlife use. Seasonal water levels, shading and connectivity to surrounding habitats are also reviewed. Terrestrial habitats are assessed for opportunities to create hibernacula and refuges, foraging areas and dispersal corridors for great crested newt.

**Fig. 24.** One of our excellent contractors and a herd of longhorn cattle at Knepp Estate. The cattle loved wallowing in the mud created during the excavation of one of 12 new ponds.





© Holly Wilkinson

**Fig. 25.** Two of six new ponds created at a compensation site in Bedfordshire, adding clean water to existing high-quality terrestrial habitat.

## Engaged landowners and local partners

NCP works at local and landscape levels with all types of landowners: small farmers, estate owners, county, local and parish councils, Wildlife Trusts and other conservation groups, as well as the Ministry of Defence and Forestry England. Our compensation sites are located in a variety of land uses, including traditional and regenerative agriculture, forestry, nature conservation and rewilding.

With 100% funding from NatureSpace to deliver habitat creation and restoration, there are no costs to our landowner partners. Schemes contribute directly to local nature recovery strategies and initiatives. Participating landowners enter into 25-year agreements and receive annual payments to compensate for loss of income from land use change and to cover habitat management costs.

NCP Project Officers are present on the ground to plan and deliver both habitat creation and monitoring programmes, ensuring landowners are well supported and able to enjoy the benefits of enhanced wildlife habitat on their land.

## Quality contractors and onsite supervision

High-quality contractors are at the heart of our compensation habitat delivery. We recognise and make best use of their local knowledge and technical expertise on the ground and collaborate closely ensuring that detailed pond and site designs are implemented as intended. NCP Project Officers work with contractors on site to ensure that best practice methods are followed and problems or challenges that crop up are addressed swiftly.

Creating and restoring ponds is not an exact science. Even with careful pre-investigations, both Project Officers and contractors need to be able to think on their feet. On-site supervision also helps ensure the safety of great crested newt and other wildlife during the implementation of site plans, particularly at more sensitive sites.

# Case Study

## Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire Border

### Number of ponds:

45 ponds across 12 compensation sites

**Land use:** Agriculture, forestry and nature conservation

### Creating new clean water ponds near existing high-quality sites can help expand freshwater wildlife populations across the landscape, by natural processes.

The Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border comprises wetland, woodland and grassland nature reserves, including statutory designated sites for nature conservation, interspersed with farmland. The region includes county-level Important Freshwater Areas (Fig. 26.1) and great crested newt SOAs (Fig. 26.2). Its importance for wildlife is recognised in both counties' Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It is also nationally important for rare bats, wetland birds and hairstreak butterflies.

The area is a focus for NCP's habitat compensation work for great crested newt and for monitoring the wider biodiversity benefits of the schemes. NCP works with a range of landowners including the Ministry of Defence, Forestry England, conservation NGOs and private landowners including farmers. Since the NatureSpace schemes began, NCP has created and restored 45 new clean water ponds and secured 181 hectares of terrestrial habitat for great crested newt at 12 compensation sites (Fig. 26) in the border region.

Our sites are varied with some managed for nature conservation, others on less productive agricultural land, and all landowners are supported by annual



Fig. 27. A new hedge just planted at a compensation site.

payments for compensation site management over 25 years. The aim is to secure and expand existing great crested newt populations and increase connectivity at the landscape scale to the benefit of wetland plants and animals. Across the Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border, 75% of compensation sites have been colonised by great crested newt (Fig. 26.4), as well as over half (56%) of the ponds. Some sites take longer to colonise because they are further away from known great crested newt populations, or have only recently been secured under the scheme. The percentage of NCP ponds that have reached Priority status in the region is very high (87%) and all sites include confirmed or provisional Priority Ponds (Fig. 26.5). Wetland plant surveys in 2025 recorded county-rare or nationally threatened wetland plants at all but three compensation sites (Fig. 26.6).

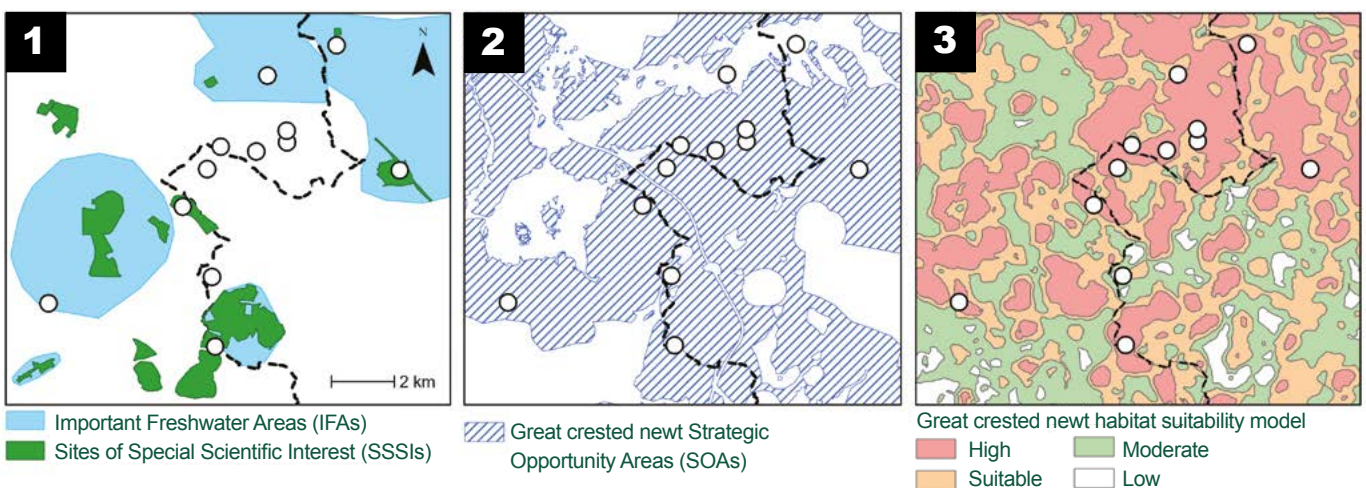


Fig. 26. Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border maps showing, for NCP compensation sites: (1) Important Freshwater Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSIs), (2) great crested newt Strategic Opportunity Areas and (3) great crested newt habitat suitability model.

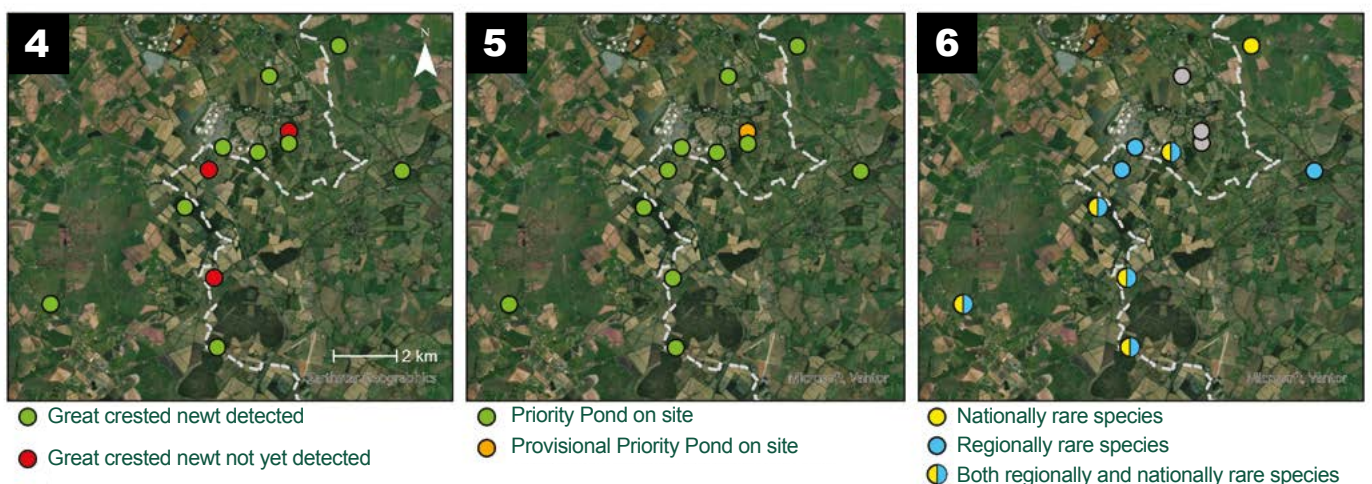


**Fig. 28.** One of six new clean water ponds in grassland which is managed by livestock grazing.

Of note for the 2025 survey was the recording of a new population of lesser water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*; GB Endangered, England Vulnerable) at a compensation site on farmland (Fig. 29). This is now the third NCP compensation pond to support the species in the area. Lesser water-plantain is very likely to have colonised from the only existing population in Oxfordshire. The local farming family who owns and manages the field is very pleased with the results of the work and the presence of this regionally and nationally threatened species on their land. The management of the site, which is secured by a 25-year agreement, includes measures ensuring both great crested newt and lesser water-plantain can continue to thrive.



**Fig. 29.** Lesser water-plantain, an Endangered species in Great Britain.



**Fig. 26 (continued).** Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border maps showing, for NCP compensation sites: (4) great crested newt occupancy, (5) presence of Priority Ponds and (6) presence of regionally and nationally threatened wetland plants.

## Case Study

### Wadhurst Estate, Sussex

**LPA:** Wealden District Council

**Number of ponds:** Eight

**Land use:** Conservation grazing

#### **A strategic approach to restoring and creating clean water ponds on a large estate can bring rapid conservation benefits.**

Once a large deer park nestled in the High Weald National Landscape, the Wadhurst Estate covers almost 800 hectares including woodlands, ghylls<sup>18</sup> (the local name for headwater streams in steep, often wooded valleys), grassland and over 100 ponds. Many of these ponds were historically dug for ironstone, as marl or clay pits, or for livestock watering. The landscape of the Estate was heavily modified in previous centuries in line with the fashion of the time, including infilling ponds and creating wide views and an ornamental lake by damming the local stream.

When NCP started working with the Estate, a programme of re-naturalisation was already underway, including the restoration of 'ghost' ponds<sup>1</sup>. Great crested newt records were few, probably in part because of a lack of surveys, but also because most of the remaining ponds were at a late succession stage, silted up and overshadowed, making them unsuitable for great crested newt breeding. Deer numbers have now been managed, historic hedge lines re-planted and lost woodland allowed to regenerate.

With clean water sources, good terrestrial habitat and – importantly – a great estate team and a supportive landowner, the Wadhurst Estate is ideally-suited to NCP's conservation work. Since 2021, NCP has delivered eight compensation ponds for great crested newt through a range of measures – including 'ghost' pond restoration, pond creation and late succession pond restoration.

Phased over a number of years, this work has increased the density and range of pond types at the landscape scale, diversifying freshwater habitats. Wildlife has responded very quickly. Great crested newts have been recorded in three NCP ponds already, which was a surprise considering the dearth of existing records. This shows the robustness of the spatial strategy underpinning the NatureSpace schemes.

Wetland plant monitoring – including both new and

Just-restored



6 month-old



1 year-old



**Fig. 30.** Sussex Weald 'ghost' pond evolution over time.



**Fig. 31.** A pondweed leafhopper on broad-leaved pondweed.

restored NCP ponds and ‘ghost’ ponds restored prior to our involvement – recorded new populations of regionally and nationally rare plants. Common plant species not previously recorded on the Estate are also appearing in these early succession ponds – from seedbanks or from natural dispersal. Of note are new records for pointed stonewort (*Nitella mucronata*), a nationally scarce species. In 2025, we were very excited to find a new population of the pondweed leafhopper (*Erotettix cyane*), a rare and elusive invertebrate and Priority species for conservation in England. The new and restored ponds are still young, and we look forward to future monitoring



**Fig. 32.** ‘Ghost’ pond restoration requires careful excavations.

results as they mature.

The Wadhurst Estate team is pursuing an ambitious, landscape-scale vision for nature and habitat restoration. We are proud to provide support for this initiative with technical advice, delivery on the ground, funding and monitoring surveys confirming the rapid results from this conservation work. We will continue to create and restore ponds through a phased and strategic approach. Providing new clean water habitat will allow great crested newt and other freshwater wildlife to thrive once more in this beautiful part of Sussex.

**Fig. 33.** Wetland plant survey in a restored ‘ghost’ pond.



## Case Study

### Colney Heath 'Furzefield', Hertfordshire

**Region:** Network Rail Eastern region

**Number of ponds:** Two

**Land use:** Lightly grazed acid heathland

#### Restoration efforts at this sensitive heathland site illustrate the ecological value of reviving 'ghost' ponds and the success of partnership working.

Furzefield is a small, six hectare, ecologically significant area, which is part of the wider Colney Heath Common Local Wildlife Site (22.5 hectares) in Hertfordshire. It represents one of the county's best remaining examples of acid heathland, a habitat now rare in this region.

Owned and managed by Colney Heath Parish Council, the site has undergone substantial restoration in recent years, focusing on scrub control, fencing and the reintroduction of grazing livestock to improve the condition of the heathland. The common supports a rich assemblage of heathland plants and is a Local Wildlife Site.

A management plan for the common, prepared by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in 2022, identified the restoration of two lost ponds as a key opportunity to enhance biodiversity and restore the natural hydrology of the site by breaking old agricultural drains. Victorian naturalists who frequented the site noted the botanical significance of two interconnected ponds on the common. A review of historical mapping showed these ponds were infilled during the 1940s, likely as part of wartime efforts to increase agricultural productivity.

In 2023, NCP started work with Colney Heath Parish Council, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the BSBI County Recorder for Hertfordshire, to agree a plan to re-excavate the infilled ponds. This required working closely with partners and taking a sensitive approach to avoid damaging the heathland, with particular consideration given to access for machinery and spoil removal. The outlines of the ponds were identified using a combination of historic maps and subtle changes in vegetation, including shifts in grass species that indicated former wetland soils. The two restored ponds are now compensation habitat for Network Rail's Eastern Organisational Licence (page 8).

In March 2024, great crested newt eggs were recorded in one of the ponds, confirming breeding within a year of excavation. Importantly, the ponds also support a range of wetland plant species uncommon in Hertfordshire including bladder sedge (*Carex vesicaria*) and lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), and the nationally scarce smooth stonewort (*Nitella flexilis*). Their biodiversity value and water quality now qualify them for Priority Pond status, only three years after restoration. The surrounding habitat provides excellent terrestrial cover and foraging opportunities for newts and other wildlife, with common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) and water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) all recorded at the site.



**Fig. 34.** One of two restored 'ghost' ponds at Furzefield, Colney Heath, which have vegetated quickly.

## References

1. A 'ghost' pond is a historical pond that was in-filled for agricultural use. More information in: Alderton, E., Sayer, C.D., Davies, R., Lambert, S.J., Axmacher, J.C. (2017). Buried alive: Aquatic plants survive in 'ghost ponds' under agricultural fields. *Biological Conservation*, 212, 105-110.
2. Gent, A.H. and Gibson, S.D. (2003). *Herpetofauna Workers Manual*. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
3. Oldham, R.S., Keeble, J., Swan, M.J.S. and Jeffcote, M. (2000). Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). *Herpetological Journal*, 10, 143-155.
4. Ewald, N. and Carter, A. (2025). *PondNet: Monitoring background trends in great crested newt conservation status in England: Survey Results 2015-2024*. Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford.
5. National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS): <https://monitoring.arc-trust.org/pages/narrs/>
6. The local planning authorities, all located in the South Midlands area, which were the first to join the NatureSpace District Licensing scheme in 2018, are Aylesbury Vale, Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Oxford City.
7. Biggs, J., McGoff, E., Ewald, N., Williams, P., Dunn, F. and Nicolet, P. (2016). *Clean Water for Wildlife technical manual. Evaluating PackTest nitrate and phosphate test kits to find clean water and assess the extent of pollution*. Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford.
8. Biggs, J., Fox, G., Nicolet, P., Walker, D., Whitfield, M. and Williams, P. (1998). *A Guide to the Methods of the National Pond Survey*. Pond Action: Oxford.
9. Biggs, J., Whitfield, M., Williams, P., Fox, G. and Nicolet, P. (2000). Factors affecting the nature conservation value of ponds: results of the National Pond Survey. In: *Pond Action (2000). Proceedings of the Ponds Conference 1998*. Pond Action, Oxford.
10. Williams, P., Biggs, J., Crowe, A., Murphy, J., Nicolet, P., et al. (2010). *Countryside Survey: Ponds Report from 2007*. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
11. Stroh, P.A., Leach, S., August, T.A., Walker, K.J., Pearman, D.A., Rumsey, F.J., Harrower, C.A. and Fay, M.F. (2014). *A Vascular Plant Red List for England*. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, Bristol.
12. Stroh, P.A., Leach, S., Walker, K.J., Pearman, D.A., Rumsey, F.J., Taylor, I., Bulman, N., Harrower, C.A. and Pescott, O.L. (2025). *A new vascular plant Red List for Great Britain*. *British and Irish Botany*, 7, 148–191.
13. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI).
14. Petrovan, S.O., Moor, H. and Schmidt, B.R. (2025). Increasingly uncommon common toads: multidecadal, ongoing abundance decline of a widespread amphibian despite volunteer conservation action. *Biodiversity Conservation*, 34, 4235–4249.
15. PSYM: Predictive Systems for Multimetric method which assesses the ecological quality of ponds and is one of the criteria for Priority Pond assessment. <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/advice-resources/survey-methods-hub/psym/>
16. Biggs, J. and Williams, P. (2023). *Priority Pond Assessment Manual*. Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford.
17. Provisional Priority Pond status was assigned using the PASS method, which predicts Priority status from environmental variables in the absence of biological data, alongside evidence of clean water with no nutrient pollution. <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/advice-resources/survey-methods-hub/priority-pond-survey/>
18. Ghyll woodlands are found in the upper reaches of rivers, where springs and streams first form in small, steep, wooded valleys (<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover/around-sussex/wetland-habitats/wet-woodland>).

## Thank you

The Newt Conservation Partnership would like to thank our partner and funder NatureSpace Partnership. Special thanks also to Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Freshwater Habitats Trust for their technical support and expertise. Our work would not be possible without the commitment of our many landowners, local planning authorities and Network Rail. We would also like to thank our dedicated and talented contractors who help our Project Officers deliver on the ground – in all weathers! And a huge thanks to all the many organisations and individuals that have worked collaboratively with us, providing expert advice and support, helped us engage with others and tell our story, and vitally, make a difference for great crested newt and other wildlife.



# Principles guiding the NatureSpace licensing schemes

- **Strategic, landscape-scale delivery**  
Habitat is located and designed to support connectivity and great crested newt population recovery, rather than relying on isolated, site-by-site mitigation.
- **More habitat created than is lost**  
High compensation ratios are applied, reversing historic habitat loss and increasing pond density in the landscape.
- **Local compensation delivery**  
Development impacts are compensated for locally, supporting local nature recovery strategies.
- **Compensation in advance of impacts**  
Compensation habitat is secured and delivered before development impacts occur, ensuring that losses are addressed proactively rather than retrospectively.
- **Focus on clean water and habitat quality**  
Clean water pond creation and restoration is fundamental to conservation success, with careful site selection and design to ensure long-term habitat suitability.
- **Long-term management and monitoring**  
Habitats are secured with long-term (25-year) funded management agreements and monitoring, allowing outcomes to be tracked and sustained over time.
- **Fully funded by development**  
All habitat creation, management and monitoring is funded through developer contributions, with no reliance on grants or taxpayer funding.
- **Certainty and efficiency for developers**  
By maintaining a habitat bank and working ahead of impacts, the schemes reduce delays, uncertainty and risk compared to traditional site-by-site licensing.

**The NatureSpace District Licensing scheme is in operation across:** Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Surrey and West Sussex. The Network Rail organisational licences are in operation across all of England. A National Highways Organisational Licence became operational across South East and South West England in September 2025. [www.naturespaceuk.com](http://www.naturespaceuk.com)

Newt Conservation Partnership  
Bury Knowle House, North Place, Oxford, OX3 9HY  
01865 595505 | [info@newtpartnership.org.uk](mailto:info@newtpartnership.org.uk)

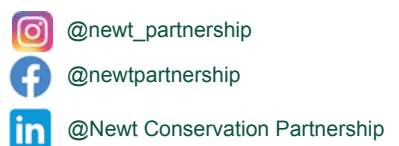
[www.newtpartnership.org.uk](http://www.newtpartnership.org.uk)

A community-benefit society registered in England and Wales (RS007634).  
© Newt Conservation Partnership, January 2026.  
All photos are copyright of the Newt Conservation Partnership unless otherwise stated.

Maps throughout this report were created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® is the intellectual property of Esri and is used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved.

Designed by Corinne Welch ([good-thinking.info](http://good-thinking.info)).

Front cover photograph: A new pond complex in Staffordshire (© NatureSpace Partnership).



We thank the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for their financial support

