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Ecological Surveys • Habitat Management • Arboricultural Surveys • Vegetation Clearance

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001	Letter Report	Steve Parnwell BA(Hons) MCIEEM FLS FRSA	Steve Parnwell BA(Hons) MCIEEM FLS FRSA	Steve Parnwell BA(Hons) MCIEEM FLS FRSA	14/06/2023

[REDACTED]
Debden Residents Community Group
Glebe House
Mill Road
Debden
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB11 3LB

14th June 2023

[REDACTED]

Re: Great Crested Newt (GCN) eDNA Sampling Debden village pond

Greenwillows Associates Ltd. was commissioned to undertake eDNA sampling and a torchlight survey of Debden village pond to establish whether Great Crested Newts are inhabiting this pond.

1.0 Background

Greenwillows Associates Ltd. Were contacted by [REDACTED] on behalf of the Debden Residents' Community Group, to carry out a survey of the village pond to establish whether Great Crested Newts were present in the pond. On the evening of 25th May 2023 Field Ecology Assistant Angelika Peters carried out a torchlight survey of Debden Pond under a licence

issued by Natural England and noted approximately 20 smooth newts. Water samples were taken and submitted for eDNA analysis.

2.0 Legislation

The Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) is a fully protected species under UK and European legislation including the Wildlife & Countryside Act (WLCA) 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (CHSR) 2017.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, or the 'Habitats Regulations 2017', transposes European Directives into English and Welsh legislation. This has recently been amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) which continues the same provision for European Protected Species after Brexit. Under these regulations, wild animals of a European Protected Species and their breeding sites or resting places are protected. It is an offence to deliberately capture, injure or kill any such wild animal and, in the case of great crested newts, deliberately take or destroy their eggs. It is also an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any such wild animal.

The Great Crested Newt is also listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which defines species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and which decision makers in local and regional authorities have due regard to when carrying out their duty to conserve biodiversity (enhancing, restoring or protecting a species or a habitat).

3.0 Survey Methodology

When Great Crested Newts inhabit a waterbody, they deposit traces of their DNA in the water. Analysis of waterbody water samples for these small environmental DNA (eDNA) traces can be undertaken to confirm Great Crested Newt habitation or establish Great Crested Newt absence.

Debden village pond was subject to an eDNA survey with water samples collected on 25th May 2023 by Angelika Peters an accredited agent under the GCN Licence of Steve Parnwell [Licence Registration Number: 2015-18295-CLS-CLS] and who has been trained in the use of eDNA sampling.

The samples taken from the waterbody were submitted for eDNA analysis to the protocol stated in DEFRA WC1067 (Biggs *et al.*, 2014).

4.0 Constraints

There were no constraints specific to the survey, however, surveys can only provide a 'snapshot' of information temporally and spatially from which behaviour can be extrapolated to make an ecological evaluation. Ecological conditions can vary on a yearly and seasonal basis.

5.0 Results

The results of the eDNA analysis are shown in Table One. The test for the Debden Village Pond was positive. Great Crested Newt DNA was identified within the sample extracted indicating the presence of the species within Debden Village Pond at the time the sample was taken or within the recent past at this location.

Table One: eDNA Results

Site Reference	Lab Sample No.	Sample Integrity Check	Degradation Check	Inhibition Check	Result	Positive Replicates†
Debden J240 – Pond 1	GCN23 4609	Pass	Pass	Pass	Positive	12/12

†Each sample is analysed with 12 replicates. If any one or more of these 12 replicates results in the positive detection of Great Crested Newt eDNA, then it is considered as positive for great crested newt presence.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

To minimise the risk of injury or mortality to Great Crested Newts occurring because of any proposed works nearby, it is recommended that works are undertaken under a Natural England Great Crested Newt licence.

Additional Comments

It is understood that a pond clearance was undertaken in August 2022. This is a critical stage of the newt breeding season and if breeding Great Crested Newts were present at that time, then it is likely that mortality of efts and juvenile Great Crested Newts would have occurred. See above for the potential criminal offences that may have been committed. NB damage to breeding/resting/shelter habitat of a European Protected Species is an absolute offence with no requirement to prove the *mens rea* of those responsible for committing/counselling or procuring such acts.

Yours sincerely



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Principal Ecologist