

White-clawed Crayfish Conservation Strategy

Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk

The white-clawed crayfish was once widespread across Britain. In Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk we have seen a marked reduction in their range. They are now classed as an endangered species and we believe that they could become locally extinct. White-clawed crayfish are protected by law and recognised in Biodiversity Action Plans.

The greatest threat to white-clawed crayfish is from the non-native invasive American signal crayfish. Signal crayfish are larger and more aggressive. They also carry a disease called crayfish plague that is fatal to our white-clawed crayfish. White-clawed crayfish have also been wiped out by pollution incidents and are threatened by habitat change.

We aim to conserve white-clawed crayfish in refuges and ark sites, rivers or lakes that are suitable for the species to thrive but safe from invasive species.

What we are trying to achieve

- Conserve populations of native white-clawed crayfish in-situ as far as possible.
- Create ark sites where white-clawed crayfish are safe and populations are self sustaining.
- Educate local people, recreational users and anglers about crayfish conservation and the check-clean-dry campaign.



Juvenile crayfish

How we are going to achieve it

Conserve populations of native white-clawed crayfish.

- Retain weirs and sluices if they are a barrier to the upstream spread of invasive signal crayfish.
- Seek to improve habitat for white-clawed crayfish where they are present.
- Educate local people, recreational users and anglers about crayfish conservation, check-clean-dry campaign and encourage reporting of suspicious and illegal activities e.g. trapping.
- Take action to rescue populations that are faced with an imminent threat.
- Encourage staff of partner organisations and general public to report sightings of crayfish to angeastfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk . Keep a log of outbreaks of crayfish plague.
- Protect white-clawed crayfish from trapping and consumption.

Create ark sites for white-clawed crayfish

- Find and establish new ark sites to expand the network of sites.



Volunteers catching white-clawed crayfish



White-clawed crayfish have a health check by volunteers



White-clawed crayfish being released into a new ark site



- Survey ark sites regularly to establish if populations are self sustaining and to identify necessary actions.
- We would like to empower local people to become custodians or guardians of their local white-clawed crayfish.
- Assess impacts of activities within an ark site on conservation of white-clawed crayfish. Seek opportunities to improve habitat and water quality.

Sharing knowledge

- Share reports and case studies to show successes and how we could improve our methods.

What we have done so far

We have set up seven ark sites across Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk including rivers and still waters. Natural England Protected Species licences and Environment Agency licences to move fish (FR2) were obtained. Many partner organisations and volunteers were involved.

Numerous white-clawed crayfish were translocated into the ark sites. The number transferred depended on how many we could collect from the donor population and how many we thought the ark site could support.

We have been monitoring these populations to check how they are doing so far we have only found low numbers. This is to be expected at this early stage. After reintroduction it is thought that it may take crayfish five years to become established. In this period there is a greater risk of dying out so it is important to keep monitoring and take action when necessary.



First juvenile crayfish to be found in an ark site river for twenty years.



For more information contact angeastfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk

Summary produced in February 2015