

## Ask an expert

Invite a local expert or Countryside Ranger into the class to see your work on newts.

They will be able to discuss the threats to Great crested newts and what can be done to help them.

Think about some questions you could ask the expert and write them down before their visit.

There may even be a nearby pond where you can go to see newts.



## Glossary

AMPHIBIAN – cold blooded vertebrates who live partly on land and usually return to water to breed

CARNIVORE – an animal that eats mainly other animals

HABITAT – the natural home of an animal or plant

HIBERNATE – sleep through the winter

MAMMALS – warm blooded vertebrate animal who produce milk to feed their young

PREDATOR – animal that gets its food by catching and eating other animals



Can you make a poem about a newt?

## THE GREAT CRESTED NEWT

The Great crested newt is a handsome chap

He looks like a dragon with his crested back

Predators don't like his dark, warty skin

Or want to get caught on that pointy back fin

But poor old newtie, he is in decline

Can't find a home that he can call mine

Those greedy fish eat their eggs and larvae

So they've packed up their bags and gone away!

Help them come back to your garden pond

Don't put in fish then they'll have a home

To raise their young with a bright coloured belly

Have you seen them on the telly?

How cool would it be to see more of the "dragons"

Strutting their stuff and flashing their tongues

## Biodiversity

What can we do to help?

The Great crested newt is part of Scotland's biodiversity, (which means the variety of life, and includes plants and animals, and the places in which they live). We can help to protect and look after Scotland's biodiversity.

- Create or help look after a pond (Always make sure there is a teacher or another adult when you are working or playing near water)
- Make a compost heap (they make a warm, mostly undisturbed place for reptiles and amphibians to sleep and hibernate in)
- Join or start a group that looks after your local areas for wildlife

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There is a poster to go with this factsheet and other posters and factsheets in the 'All About' series. Download the poster from [www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/education/poster/p-newts.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/education/poster/p-newts.pdf) or contact SNH, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth, PH1 3EW



# All about Great Crested Newts



The Great crested newt is the biggest and the rarest of the three types of newts found in Scotland. It can grow up to 16 cm long and live for up to 15 years.

Another name for it is the Warty Newt because its skin has tiny white spots and warty bumps.



Males and females have a bright orange belly with black spots and the male also grows a jagged crest along its body and along its tail in the spring.

## A Rare Animal

The Great crested newt is a rare animal and it is important that we look after them in Scotland. The ponds they need to breed in, are being lost, as a result of pollution, destruction and lack of management (ponds will tend to grow over with plants unless they are looked after). Ponds with fish are also bad news for Great crested newts because fish eat the tadpoles.



## Cold Blood

Newts are vertebrates (like us, they have backbones). However unlike mammals they are cold-blooded. This means that they cannot keep themselves warm and that their body temperature goes up and down, as the air or water temperature around them changes.

(You could find them keeping warm in your compost heap during the day!)

## Amphibians

Newts are amphibians like frogs and toads. They have to lay their eggs in water and young newts have gills like fish. As they grow they lose their gills and grow lungs.

The adults can live out of the water but they need to stay damp or they dry out too much, so they do not bask in the sunshine like reptiles.

Newts hide away during the day and come out to hunt for food on wet or damp evenings.

## Wart Protection

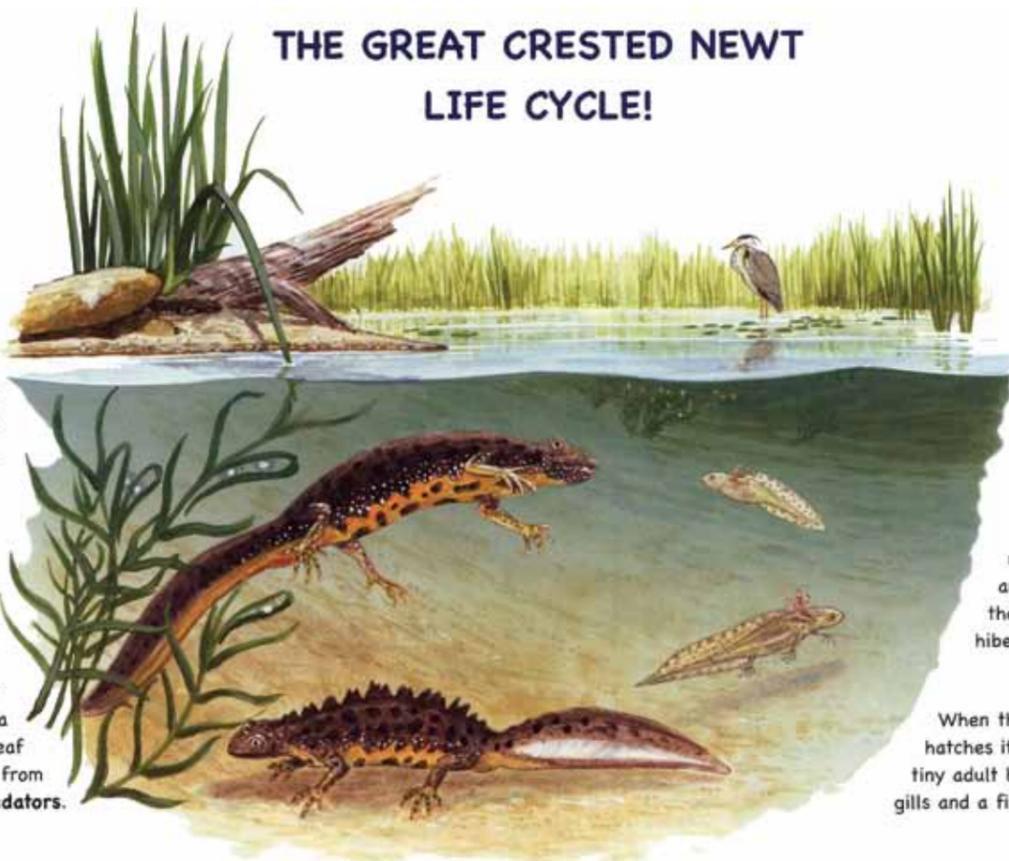
Adult Great crested newts taste horrible because their warty skin contains poisons. (A Victorian scientist discovered this when her cat became ill after biting a newt – the cat recovered!) This puts off mammal predators but herons and jackdaws still eat them.

Newt tadpoles have no warts to protect them and are gobbled up by fish.

## THE GREAT CRESTED NEWT LIFE CYCLE!

Grown up newts leave the pond and shelter under logs and stones during the day so that they do not dry up.

Female newts lay around 300 eggs, and carefully wrap each egg in a folded over leaf to protect it from predators.



They hibernate in the winter in crevices deep under the soil or under stone walls and houses where they will not be frozen.

Sometimes newts, frogs and toads share the same hibernation place.

When the baby newt hatches it looks like a tiny adult but also has gills and a fin on its tail.

### NEWT FACTS

They breathe air. In water they can absorb some oxygen through their skins, but they need to rise to the surface regularly to take gulps of air.

Adults usually remain within 500m of their breeding site.

The female lays 2 or 3 eggs per day from the Spring months, through to Summer, until 200-300 eggs have been laid.

The Great crested newt's scientific name is *Triturus cristatus*.

Scottish names for the newt – Ask; Esk; Man-keeper; Dearc-luachrach.

Most Great crested newts are found in central Scotland, but they can be found as far north as Strathpeffer, in the Highlands.

Some scientists believe there have been amphibians in Scotland for 375 million years.

Scotland's commonest newt is the Palmate newt. It can be found anywhere from gardens to mountainsides.

### What do they eat?

ADULT NEWTS are **carnivorous** and eat little creatures found in the soil and water, such as small worms and insects.

NEWT TADPOLES eat small pond creatures such as water fleas.



Above - a Palmate newt - the commonest newt in Scotland

### Protecting newts

As Great crested newts are now so rare they are protected under Scottish and European laws. It is against the law to kill or injure them or pollute or damage the ponds in which they live.

Can you draw and complete a food chain which includes a newt?



?  
?  
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### MAKE A QUIZ

Look through the fact sheet and write a set of quiz questions about the Great crested newt which you could ask the rest of the class.

Put the answers on a separate piece of paper.

### NEWT 24 – A Diary



Discuss with your group the animals and people a Great crested newt might meet during the day and night. Think about:

- the dangers from predators
- where the newts live
- what they eat

Write a diary of 24 hours in the life of a Great crested newt.



### ART WORK

Read the factsheet and look closely at the poster.

Design a frieze showing a cross section of a pond and surrounding area

Draw or paint pictures on card, cut them out and attach them to the frieze

You could include all the stages in the newt's life cycle and some 3D models.

### MAKE YOUR OWN NEWT!

There is an activity on the back of the Great crested newt poster to make a 3D newt

