
A Survey for
European Protected Species – Great crested newt

at

Lower Parks Farm, Parkside
Rossett, Wrexham

Report by:

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LOWER PARKS FARM, PARKSIDE, ROSSETT, WREXHAM
AMPHIBIAN SURVEY – MARCH 2014

BACKGROUND

Application is being made to Wrexham County Borough Council for the development of a Biogas Site within the farm complex of Lower Parks Farm, Parkside, Rossett, Wrexham. Any application has to be accompanied by a mitigation plan for the protection of Great crested newts.

The land is owned by Mr Richard Tomlinson who commissioned Mrs Philippa Perry, Perry Amphibian & Reptile Conservation to undertake a survey for the presence of Great crested newts (GCN).

GREAT CRESTED NEWT ECOLOGY

Most GCN spend the greater part of their life on land, foraging, resting and hibernating within 200 to 500 meters of the breeding pond, only using the waterbody for breeding during April and May although some will stay in the water for longer periods. Juvenile GCN will commence leaving the water in early August travelling up to 500m from the breeding water and remaining on land two to three years before maturing. Research in recent years has found GCN travelling up to 1km from breeding water.

GCN travel along hedgerows and other linear features, foraging in grassland and sheltering in tree roots, burrows, and under wood piles and rubble. They will use domestic gardens and buildings, finding shelter in walls, cellars and beneath stored items. GCN can climb, and find their way underground down cracks, gaps and small mammal burrows.

LEGISLATION

The GCN is protected by national and international legislation: the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) which fully protect the GCN, its breeding sites and resting places. It is an offence to deliberately kill, injure, capture or disturb the species; damage or destroy its breeding site or resting place. In summary legal protection is afforded the species and its habitat at all stages of its life cycle.

DESKTOP SURVEY

Natural Resources Wales hold records of GCN being present in two locations south east of Lower Parks Farm at a distance of approximately 1200 meters in a woodland pond and 700 meters, a pond in grazing land.

THE SURVEY SITE

Lower Parks Farm at Grid Reference SJ:384.552 is an organic dairy farm having a large complex of buildings, hardstanding and storage areas. The location for the proposed Biogas site is close to the complex boundary with adjacent pasture. This area is mainly hardstanding having to the west a large slurry lagoon and to the east, separated by a hedgerow, a deep steep-sided rainwater storage area approximately 60m x 30m. **See Annex 1: Plan of farm complex and location Biogas Site.**

The fields are grazed by cattle during the summer months. They have well maintained ditch and hedgerow boundaries with a dedicated vehicular access track running between fields. The ponds are fenced to prevent access by cattle.

THE SURVEY

A walkover survey was carried out by day on the 28th March 2014 using a combination of techniques where practical: ground searches, netting water bodies and egg search.

The survey focused on the location for the Biogas site and immediate surrounds and across three fields to the south of the site up to a distance of 500m. The weather was fine and dry.

SURVEY RESULTS

Location for the Biogas Site – mainly hardstanding with deposits of hardcore, equipment/ Machinery and debris.

Ground searches where practical found no presence of amphibians.

The Slurry Lagoon – located at the end of the cow sheds was full of slurry. Whilst the cows are in the sheds the slurry is pumped out regularly.

The Rainwater Storage Area – full of water. No floating, submerged or marginal vegetation.

Netted from the bank where possible – very deep clear water – no invertebrates and no indications of amphibian presence. This water is regularly drawn off for use on the farm.

First field – Pond 1. Shown on the map against the hedgerow at a distance of approximately 120m from the location for the Biogas Site.

The ditch along this hedgerow was wide in places and full of water but a pond was not located.

Second field – Pond 2. A distance of approximately 200m from the location for the Biogas Site in the centre of the field. A large area of open water approximately 40m x 25m surrounded by scrub with Willow and occasional Oak. Marginal vegetation: Soft rush and Pendulus sedge; submerged vegetation: Flowering rush, Fools watercress and Water crowfoot. Waterfowl nesting.

Netting from 100% bank access found no presence of amphibians, and searches of the submerged vegetation found no evidence of newt eggs.

Third field – Pond 3. A distance of approximately 400m from the location for the Biogas Site in the centre of the field. A large area of open water approximately 40m x 25m surrounded by scrub, Willow, Hawthorn and occasional Oak. Marginal vegetation: Soft rush. No submerged or floating vegetation. Waterfowl nesting.

Bank access restricted by Bramble, and water level high. Netting carried out from only 5% of the bank. No evidence of amphibian presence.

SURVEY ASSESSMENT

Ponds 2 and 3 – both large areas of open water could be considered as suitable breeding waters for Great crested newts, with the surrounding trees and scrub providing favourable terrestrial habitat.

The slurry lagoon whilst in use would be unsuitable habitat for any amphibians. The rainwater storage area with water drawn off regularly would not provide the conditions required to be an amphibian breeding pond.

CONCLUSION

The survey was carried out in good weather conditions at the end of an exceptionally mild winter when it could be expected to find amphibians in the ponds. Male GCN return first to the breeding waters and in mild winters have been recorded returning in January and even as early as December.

The ideal conditions for supporting a population of GCN are a cluster of ponds within a 1km square with a diversity of terrestrial habitat: meadow/pasture for foraging, hedgerows and ditches for dispersal between breeding, foraging and hibernation sites. These conditions can be found on Lower Parks Farm land and adjoining farmland with a recorded GCN breeding pond located at SJ:3800.5456 approximately 700m from Pond 3 and having 2 ponds in between. Not all ponds in a cluster will be used for breeding but are important in acting as stepping stone ponds.

See Annex 2: Map showing location of ponds.

It is concluded that Ponds 2 and 3 provide favourable conditions for GCN: large areas of open water surrounded by a peripheral of trees, scrub and pasture, and whilst they may not be used for breeding could be used as stepping stone ponds within the wider pondscape.

The location for the Biogas Site and the farm complex lie within the GCN terrestrial range of both Ponds 2 and 3, and therefore it is possible GCN, in particular juvenile GCN dispersing up to 500m and sometimes up to 1km from breeding waters could travel into the farm complex where they would remain for 2-3 years before maturing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Great crested newts. It is recommended as a precautionary measure that the working area for the construction of the Biogas Site is hand searched for the presence of any amphibians by a GCN Licence holder immediately prior to any work commencing. The licence holder will then remain present whilst any items are lifted from the site inspecting for small mammal burrows and the presence of sheltering amphibians. **See Method Statement.**

NOTE: Should any GCN be found during this process it may then be necessary to erect temporary amphibian exclusion fencing around the working area to remain in place until all work is completed.

Landscaping

The boundary hedgerows south and east of the proposed Biogas Site are currently low with occasional mature trees and are adequate as wildlife corridors. For the hedgerows to provide screening for the Biogas Site, their height would need to be increased and additional trees eg: Oak, Ash, Black Poplar, planted alongside the hedgerow.

**CONSTRUCTION OF A BIOGAS SITE
AT LOWER PARKS FARM, PARKSIDE, ROSSETT, WREXHAM
EUROPEAN PROTECTED SPECIES – GREAT CRESTED NEWT**

METHOD STATEMENT

AIM

To prevent death or injury to great crested newts (GCN) during all works associated with the construction of a Biogas Site at Lower Parks Farm, Rossett.

DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

An area of approximately 1707m² to be prepared for a base. The existing area of hardstanding will be cleared and the area extended into the slurry lagoon which will be first pumped out, infilled with hardcore and concreted over. All construction works will then be carried out, and equipment and construction materials stored on the hardstanding.

TIMESCALE

It is estimated the work will be completed within 6 months.

REASONABLE AVOIDANCE MEASURES

Due to the possibility of GCN being present within the farm complex and the Biogas Site the work must be undertaken with due regard to the species. The GCN and its habitat is fully protected by national and international legislation at all stages of its life cycle.

Specific to this work contractors must comply with the following:

- An ecologist holding the relevant GCN Licence will be present before any work commences to:
- Ensure compliance with the Method Statement
- Carry out hand searches of the area to be worked for the presence of GCN
- Remain present whilst the area is cleared of all removable items: debris, equipment, and to be given time to search the cleared areas for the presence of GCN.
- The ecologist will be given adequate notice of work commencing – a minimum of one week.

- Any equipment and materials having to remain on site overnight to be stored on the hardstanding and as far away as possible from the hedgerow boundary.

NOTE: If newts are found when the ecologist is not present, work must cease and the ecologist consulted.

ECOLOGIST – Licensed GCN handler

Pip Perry MBE

Licence Number: 43518:OTH:SCA:2013

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ANNEX 1 To:
Amphibian Survey Report
Lower Parks Farm, Parkside
Rossett, Wrexham
DATE: April 2014
Plan of Farm complex and
Location Biogas Site

ANNEX 2 TO:
Amphibian Survey Report
Lower Park Farm, Parkside
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Map showing location ponds