

**Whitcher Wildlife Ltd.  
Ecological Consultants.**



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**PARK HOLLOW, WOMBWELL.**

**OS REF: SE 40516 02717.**

**ECOLOGY SURVEY.**

**Ref No: 190603.**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2019.**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION.**

1.1. There are plans to construct a new dwelling on a plot of land off Park Hollow, Wombwell. An ecology survey is required in support of that planning application.

1.2. Whitcher Wildlife Ltd has been commissioned to carry out a walk over ecology survey of the site to determine whether there are any ecological issues in connection with the proposed works.

1.3. The site survey was carried out on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019. This report outlines the findings of that survey and makes appropriate recommendations.

1.4. Appendices I to III of this report provide additional information on specific species and are designed to assist the reader in understanding the contents of this report.

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## 2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

2.1. Prior to visiting the site, the survey area was cross referenced to maps and aerial photographs to give a general idea of the habitats and potential issues within the area and to identify potential access and walking routes.

2.2. The survey area was walked where access was agreed and public rights of way were used where no access was agreed. All habitats within and immediately around the survey area were documented and the dominant species within that habitat listed in line with the JNCC Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat surveys.

2.3. The survey area and immediate surrounding area was thoroughly searched for evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with Harris S, Cresswell P and Jefferies D (1989). *Surveying Badgers*. Mammal Society: -

- \* Badger setts.
- \* Badger latrines or dung pits.
- \* Badger snuffle holes and evidence of foraging.
- \* Badger paths.
- \* Badger prints in areas of soft mud.
- \* Badger hairs caught on fencing.

2.4. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) activity by looking for the following signs, in line with Rob Strachan, Tom Moorhouse and Merryl Gelling (2011). *Water Vole Handbook: Third Edition*: -

- \* Water vole burrows.
- \* Water vole faeces and latrines.
- \* Water vole feeding stations.
- \* Water vole runs.
- \* Water vole prints in areas of soft mud.
- \* Water vole lawns.
- \* Predator field signs.

2.5. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) activity by looking for the following signs

in line with the P Chanin (2003). *Monitoring the Otter and Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers: Monitoring Series No10 Guidelines*: -

- \* Otter prints in soft mud.
- \* Otter spraints.
- \* Otter Holts.

2.6. The survey area was searched for watercourses and waterbodies. Where found, and where safe to enter the water, all were thoroughly searched for the presence of crayfish, for approximately 50m in each direction of the site, by searching under rocks and logs. Where stated, crayfish traps were also deployed into the watercourse. All survey work was carried out in accordance with the *Conserving Natural 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No 1, Protocol for Monitoring the White Clawed Crayfish*.

2.7. The survey area was searched for mature trees and derelict buildings and where found these were checked for potential bat roosting sites in line with Collins, J. (ed.) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)* by looking for the following signs: -

- \* Holes, cracks or crevices.
- \* Bat Droppings.

2.8. The land immediately adjacent to the survey area was assessed for bat roosting potential and bat foraging potential. Connective routes and flight lines were also assessed whilst on site and using maps of the area.

2.9. The area within 500m of the survey site was cross referenced to maps to highlight all ponds close to the site. Where possible, all ponds identified were accessed using agreed access or public rights of way to assess the potential for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) to be present.

2.10. The survey area was assessed for the potential for reptiles and suitable reptile habitats. Where applicable the area was also searched for the presence of reptiles.

2.11. Where appropriate, the habitat within and surrounding the survey area was searched for species such as hazel, oak, honeysuckle, bramble and other species which may provide potential habitat for hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). Field signs such as feeding remains and nests were also searched for where possible, in line with P Bright, P Morris and T Mitchell-Jones *the Dormouse Conservation Handbook 2nd Edition*.

2.12. Where appropriate, the area within and surrounding the survey area was assessed for its potential to house habitat for red squirrels. Field signs of red squirrels were searched for at least every 50m, looking for any dreys, feeding signs or sightings of red squirrels.

2.13. All surveys were carried out in line with the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) survey standards and advice.

2.14. The survey was undertaken by Derek Whitcher who has over twenty years' experience of surveying for wildlife and has run his own wildlife consultancy since 1998. He has extensive experience of a wide variety of survey techniques for a variety of species of protected wildlife supplemented by attendance on a wide range of training courses through CIEEM, FSC and BCT. As a member of CIEEM he is committed to continuous professional development, a continual process of learning and career development, a condition of CIEEM membership. He holds current Natural England survey licences for barn owl, bat, great crested newt and white clawed crayfish.

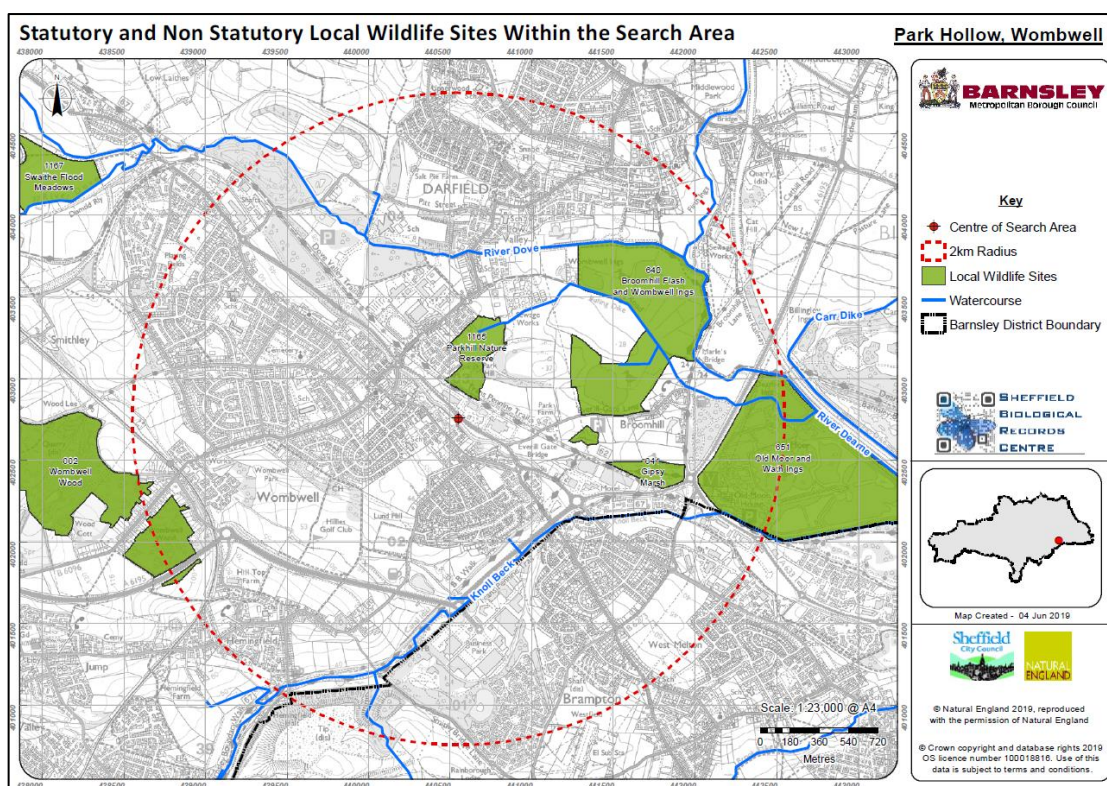
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### 3. SURVEY RESULTS.

#### 3.1. Data Search Results.

3.1.1. A data search request was submitted to Barnsley Biological Records Centre for existing records of designated sites and protected species within 2km of the site.

3.1.2. No designated site records were provided but there are records of a number of Local Nature Reserves within the area around the site, shown on the map below. These include Park Hill NR, Gypsy Marsh NR, Broomhill Flash NR and Old Moor and Wath Ings NR. These all lie on the opposite side of the A633, Valley Way and the disused railway line, at sufficient distance to be unaffected by this small development.



3.1.3. No relevant protected species records were identified in the area around the site.

3.1.4. There are records of water voles in the surrounding area but most of these are historic records and not near the site.

3.1.5. There are records of otters in the River Dove.

3.1.6. There are historic records of great crested newts in Wombwell Golf Course Pond from 1991 and more recent records in Ponds off Cortonwood Roundabout from 2017. These records are all too far from the site to be relevant.

### 3.2. The Surveyed Area.

3.2.1. The aerial photograph below shows the location of the site shown by the yellow arrow. The site is on the northeast side of Park Hollow



3.2.2. The site is located at the eastern end of the residential area of Wombwell with existing housing to the west and with adjacent housing to the north and south. To the northeast is a strip of woodland containing the remnants of the old Dearne and Dove Canal, otherwise known as the Elsecar Canal, with Wombwell bypass beyond and with industrial units beyond that.

3.2.3. The photograph below shows the site as it is at present with a small building and various play areas present between the trees.



3.2.4. The ground on site lacks vegetation cover, in part due to heavy shading from the trees on site and in part due to human activity on the site.

3.2.5. To the rear of the site there is a bank leading up to the old Dearne and Dove Canal, otherwise known as the Elsecar Canal. The bank supports sparse vegetation, predominantly Bramble, Hemlock, Jack by the Hedge and Cow Parsley.



3.2.6. The old Canal is along the back of the site, as shown in the photograph below. This contains shallow water on top of dense silt.



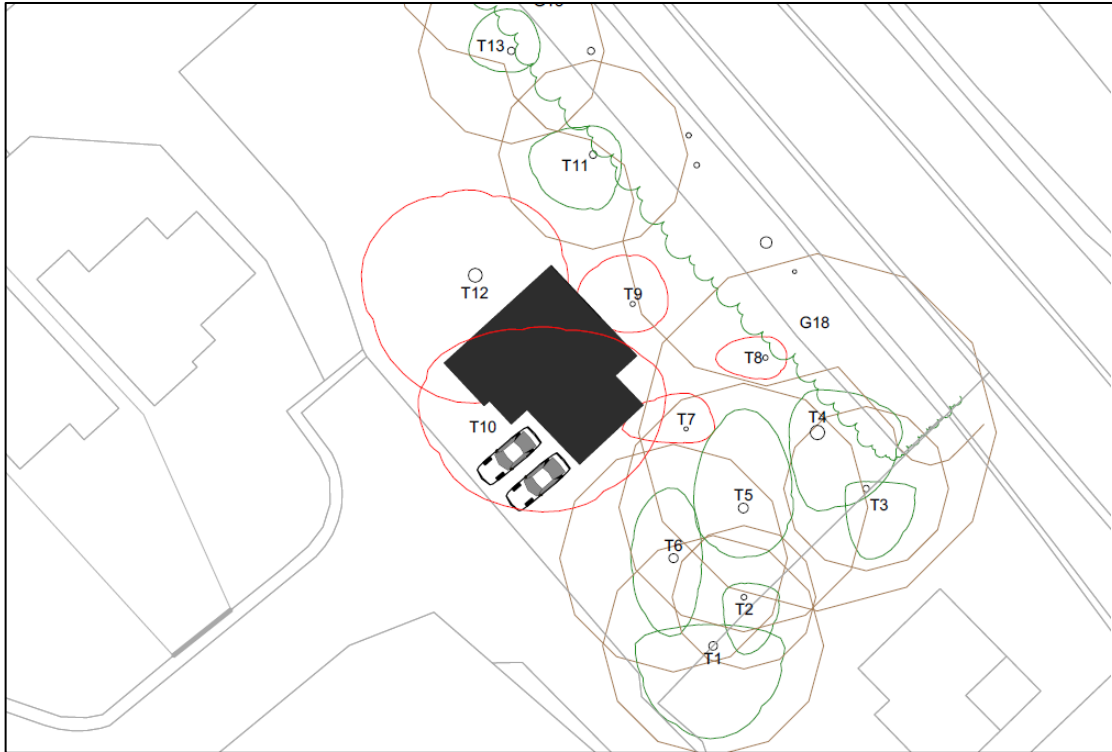
### **3.3. Description of Fauna.**

3.3.1. There are no badger setts or badger field signs on the site and the site is assessed to be totally unsuitable for badgers.

3.3.2. There are no watercourses in the area around the site to provide habitat for water voles, otters or white clawed crayfish. The section of the old Dearne and Dove Canal, otherwise known as the Elsecar Canal, at the back of the site contained shallow water at the time of this survey but is likely to dry up during dry weather. The margins are silt and banks that support only sparse vegetation. The site is therefore assessed to be totally unsuitable for water voles, otters or crayfish and no evidence of these species were found.

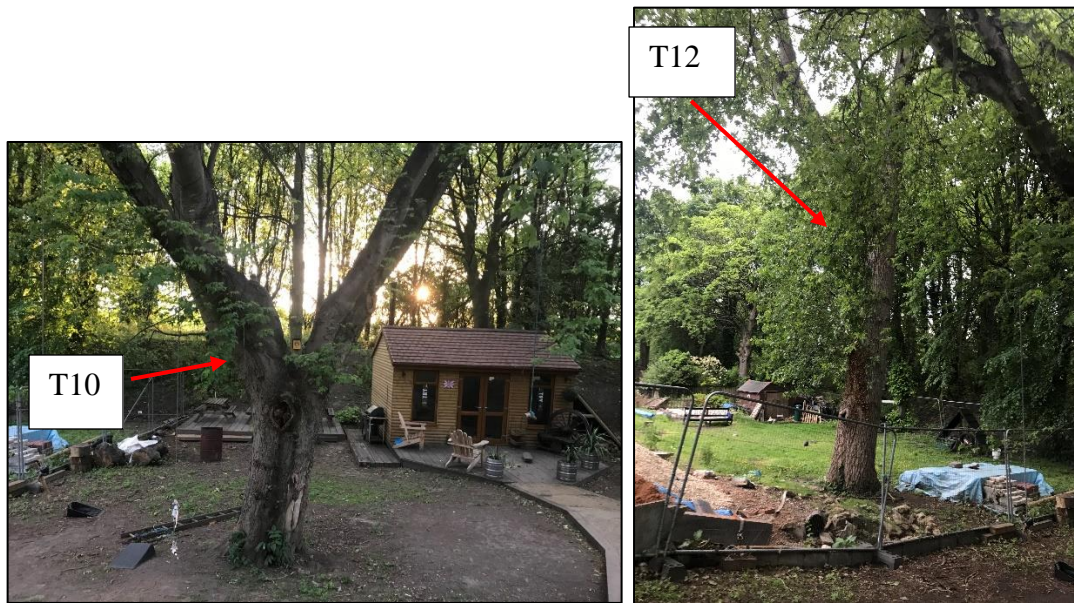
3.3.3. There are no ponds on site or in the immediate surrounding area to provide habitat for breeding amphibians. The canal is assessed to be unsuitable habitat that will dry out during dry periods. There is a pond on the industrial sites on the opposite side of the A633, Valley Way but this is a fairly large waterbody that is likely to contain fish and with the main road as a barrier to movement between. The only existing records are either historic or refer to Cortonwood roundabout, well away from this site.

3.3.4. There are five trees on the site that are planned for removal as shown on the following extract from the arboricultural survey.



3.3.5. Tree 8a was reported to be a 75% dead lime and that has already been removed. Each of the remaining trees was inspected and viewed from ground level, none contain potential bat roosting features. The trees are shown in the photographs below.





3.3.6. The trees around the site provide opportunities for foraging and commuting bats as the site is part of a linear corridor alongside Valley Way. The foraging value of the site cannot be fully assessed during a daytime visit. The proposed development will have some effect on the foraging habitat but will not fragment that habitat.

3.3.7. The trees and vegetation around the site provide opportunities for nesting birds during the nesting season, which extends from March to September each year. No nests were identified during this survey although a full nesting bird survey was not carried out.

3.3.8. The site was assessed to be unsuitable for reptiles as the site is within an urban setting and there was a lack of basking opportunities on the site.

3.3.9. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for hazel dormouse as it lacks continuity to other suitable habitats.

3.3.10. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for red squirrels.

3.3.11. One alien, invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act was identified on the site. Himalayan balsam was found growing alongside the Canal, as shown below.



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## **4. EVALUATION OF FINDINGS.**

4.1. There are no statutory designated sites or local nature reserves in the immediate area surrounding the site and therefore the works will have no impact on such sites.

4.2. No badger setts or field signs were identified on the site and therefore the development will have no impact on badgers.

4.3. There are no watercourses in the area around the site to provide habitat for water voles, otters or white clawed crayfish. The section of the old Dearne and Dove Canal, otherwise known as the Elsecar Canal, at the back of the site contained shallow water at the time of this survey but is likely to dry up during dry weather. The margins are silt and banks that support only sparse vegetation. The site is therefore assessed to be totally unsuitable for water voles, otters or crayfish and no evidence of these species were found. The development will cause no negative impact on these species.

4.4. There are no ponds on site or in the immediate surrounding area to provide habitat for breeding amphibians. The canal is assessed to be unsuitable habitat that will dry out during dry periods. There is a pond on the industrial sites on the opposite side of the A633, Valley Way but this is a fairly large waterbody that is likely to contain fish and with the main road as a barrier to movement between. The proposed development will therefore have no negative impact on great crested newts.

4.5. There are four trees to be cleared from the site. Each was visually inspected for potential bat roosts and none were found. Clearance of these trees will have no impact on roosting bats.

4.6. The trees around the site provide potential foraging and commuting habitat for bats. However, the woodland edge will be retained and therefore the site will still provide the same level of potential for foraging and commuting bats after the development as long as a sympathetic lighting scheme is employed. With such precautions, there will be minimal impact on bat foraging habitat.

4.7. The trees, bramble and scrub within the survey area provide nesting habitat for birds during the nesting season, which extends from March to September each year. Site clearance during the nesting season will potentially have high impact on any nesting birds present unless due care is taken.

4.8. The site is assessed to have no potential for reptiles to be present and therefore the proposed development will have no impact on reptiles.

4.9. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for hazel dormouse, outside the natural range of the species. The proposed development will therefore have no impact on the species.

4.10. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for red squirrels outside the normal range for the species and therefore there will be no impact on the species.

4.11. One alien, invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act were identified during the survey. Himalayan balsam is growing alongside the Canal. But not on the proposed development area. With due care, the proposed development will not cause such plants to spread.

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## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS.**

5.1. It is recommended that all vegetation clearance is carried out outside the nesting bird season, which extends from March to September. Any vegetation clearance within that window must be preceded by a nesting bird survey and any nests identified must be left undisturbed until the young have fledged.

5.2. It is recommended that a sensitive lighting scheme be employed on the site that avoids light shining on the woodland edge and the bat commuting and foraging habitat. Use of down lights is recommended.

5.3. Care should be taken on site to ensure that no amphibians are harmed during the works. The following precautionary measures should be employed.

- All personnel employed on site should be advised that amphibians may breed in the Canal.
- Vegetation clearance on the site should be no lower than 150mm above ground.
- All materials stored on the ground should be lifted cleanly rather than dragged and the area underneath should be checked for sheltering amphibians.
- Any amphibians found should be placed under a piece of felt or equivalent near the Canal.
- In the extremely unlikely event a great crested newt is found, works should temporarily cease and the undersigned contacted for further advice.

5.4. It is recommended that all Himalayan balsam found growing on the site should be pulled and left to die while in flower and before it can produce seeds and spread. A toolbox talk is appended to this report to assist identification.

5.5. It is recommended that biodiversity enhancements are provided on the site in line with the advice of the NPPF. In this case it is recommended that an integral bat brick be built into the new dwelling to provide additional bat roost potential.

5.6. There are already nest boxes present on the site. It is recommended that a further four nest boxes be provided on the site to provide additional nesting opportunities.

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Checked by:	
Jenny Whitcher Roebuck MCIEEM.	Date: 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2019.

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## **Appendix I. NESTING BIRD INFORMATION.**

### *Ecology*

The nesting season will vary according to the weather each year but generally commences in March, peaks during May and June and continues until September. It is also worth remembering that some birds nest in trees and scrub but others are ground nesting or prefer man-made structures or buildings.

### *Surveys*

Nesting bird surveys search for potential nest sites in vegetation, buildings etc. Potential nesting sites are observed over a suitable period of time for bird movements or calling male birds that would indicate the presence of a nest. The presence of a nest can be identified from the field signs without the necessity to see the nest itself, thereby avoiding any disturbance of the nests. The best way to avoid this issue is to plan for vegetation clearance to be carried out outside the bird-nesting season.

### *Legislation*

Nesting birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Part 1. -(1) Of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - kills, injures or takes any wild bird; takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird, he shall be guilty of an offence.

Part 1. -(5) of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young; or disturbs young of such a bird, he shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a special penalty.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 amends the above by inserting after “intentionally” the words “or recklessly”.

## **Appendix II. BAT INFORMATION.**

### *Ecology*

There are currently 18 species of bat residing in Britain, 17 of which are known to breed here. They are extremely difficult to identify in the hand and even more so in flight.

All appear to be diminishing in numbers, probably due to habitat change and shortage of food, caused by pesticides, as insects are their sole diet.

As their diet consists solely of insects, bats hibernate during the winter when their food source is at its most scarce. They will spend the winter in hollow trees, caves, mines and the roofs of buildings.

Certain species, particularly the pipistrelle (the commonest and most widespread British bat) can quickly adapt to man-made structures and will readily use these to roost and to rear their young.

### *Surveys*

During walkover surveys, bat roosts can be identified by looking for:

- Suitable holes, cracks and crevices within any building, tree or other structure.
- Bat droppings along walls, window cills, or on the ground.
- Prey remains, such as insect wings.

Further investigations can be made using endoscopes, by carrying out aerial inspections of trees or by conducting bat activity surveys during dusk and dawn over summer months.

### *Legislation*

Bats are protected under Appendix II and III of the Bern Convention (1982), Schedule 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex IV of the Habitats Directive (some species under Annex II), Annex II of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) and EUROBATS agreement. Numerous species are

also listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) making them species of principal importance.

All bats and their roosts are therefore protected in the UK. This makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any bat, to interfere with any place used for shelter or protection, or to intentionally disturb any animal occupying such a place.

The UK has designated maternity and hibernacula areas as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) under the Habitats Directive. Implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan also includes action for a number bat species and the habitats which support them.

Where development proposals are likely to affect a bat roost site, a licence is required from Natural England.

## **Appendix III. GREAT CRESTED NEWT INFORMATION.**

### *Ecology*

Great Crested Newts breed in ponds and other water bodies. They can begin to migrate to their breeding ponds as early as the first frost-free days in late January with the majority reaching their breeding ponds by mid-March. Timing will be influenced by several factors, primarily evening temperatures above 5°C and rainfall.

The peak egg-laying period is from mid-March to mid-May. The newts will lay their eggs individually, mainly on the leaves of submerged plants. The larva hatch after three weeks and then take another 2-3 months to complete larval development. Adult newts generally leave their breeding ponds from late May onwards.

Once the larvae have completed metamorphosis (the transition from aquatic larvae, efts, to land-adapted juveniles), they emerge from the pond. This emergence begins in late August and generally continues until late October. It takes 2-4 years to reach sexual maturity, during which time the newts will be land based.

Adults and immature newts spend the winter in places that afford protection from frost and flooding. This will generally be underground amongst tree roots, in mammal burrows, or under suitable refuges above ground like deadwood or rubble piles. Hibernation may last from October to February.

Whilst on land, outside the hibernation period, great crested newts will forage at night, taking a wide range of invertebrate prey.

Great Crested Newts therefore spend the majority of their time on land and only visit the ponds for breeding purposes.

Great Crested Newts will travel large distances between ponds and terrestrial refuges. It is recommended that anywhere within 500m of a pond should be treated as potential Great Crested Newt habitat.

### *Surveys*

Walkover surveys will identify the suitability of any ponds within the area for Great Crested Newts by using an HSI assessment. The terrestrial habitat and their links will also be assessed.

Aquatic surveys of newts can be carried out through the trapping of ponds in suitable weather conditions during the breeding season, although these surveys do not provide accurate population estimates.

Terrestrial surveys and exclusions can be conducted between March and September when newts are moving out of breeding ponds.

An experienced surveyor must carry out the surveys and must be in possession of an appropriate Natural England Great Crested Newt survey license.

It is essential that Great Crested Newt surveys are planned well in advance of any development and ideally before Planning Consent is sought. Surveys can only be carried out at the appropriate time of year and repeat surveys are essential.

### ***Legislation***

Great Crested Newts are protected under Appendix II of the BERN Convention (1982), Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex II and IV of the Habitats Directive, Annex II of the Conservation and Wildlife Regulations (2010) and are listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Communities Act (2006) making them a species of principal importance.

This makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any Great Crested Newt, to interfere with any place used for shelter or protection, or to intentionally disturb any animal occupying such a place.

If Great Crested Newts are to be affected by any development, a thorough assessment of the population is essential followed by the design of a comprehensive mitigation package. Only when this has been done can a license application be submitted to Natural England for approval. It takes 30 working days for a license application to be determined and the period that mitigation measures take can be measured in months. It is therefore essential to plan well in advance of development commencing.

## Toolbox Talk: Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan Balsam was introduced into the UK in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as an ornamental garden plant. The plant has since become established in the wild growing in a wide range of habitats, predominantly damp habitats and along watercourses. Himalayan Balsam grows in dense stands and therefore along river banks it can increase the likelihood of flooding during periods of heavy rainfall and can leave the river banks bare and exposed to erosion during the winter.

### Identification.

Himalayan Balsam grows to around 2m and has a hollow, brittle stem. The plant stem is green to red early in the season and turns pink to red during the summer.



The plant has leaves up to 15cm long which are finely serrated along the edges and may have a pink mid-rib. The flowers are trumpet shaped and pink.



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### Habitat and Spreading.

Himalayan Balsam grows in a range of habitats but prefers damp habitats and river corridors. The plant grows in dense stands that out-compete native species. Along river corridors the plant can increase the likelihood of flooding during periods of heavy rainfall and leaves the river banks bare and exposed to erosion during the winter.



Himalayan Balsam spreads solely by seeds, which are small and easily carried by wind or water. The seed heads are approximately 2.5cm long and explode on touch when ripe.

The best form of control of the plant is to prevent it from seeding by cutting back or pulling before it can seed.

### Legislation.

Under section 14 and Part II of Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence for it to be planted or otherwise caused to grow in the wild. This includes spreading the species by transferring polluted ground material from one area to the other.

If Himalayan balsam is identified during works, stop all works and contact Whitcher Wildlife Ltd directly on 01226 753271 or at [info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk](mailto:info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk)