

What's Happening?

The Environment Agency, English Nature, the International Association of Astacology and Severn Trent Water share the aims of many local groups in working to protect the native crayfish as a unique part of Midlands biodiversity.



Work is underway to safeguard and improve habitats and to re-introduce the native crayfish to its former range.



Ideal crayfish habitat: rocks, roots & shade
Inset: native crayfish reared for re-introduction

In addition, research is looking at ways to try to control the spread of alien crayfish. Central to this is the need to monitor existing populations and to listen to and communicate with landowners, water-users and other members of the public.

Please help to protect our native crayfish and maintain the natural balance in our lakes and rivers by following the 'Crayfish Code' (see overleaf).

The Crayfish Code

Protect Crayfish Habitat

Native crayfish are protected by law, but their habitat too must be conserved. Always seek advice before carrying out works in or near water which may disturb crayfish or their habitat.

Help Stop Crayfish Plague

Plague can be spread accidentally on damp equipment such as fishing tackle. If you've fished where alien crayfish are present, please dry or disinfect equipment before taking a trip to another water.

Never Use Crayfish as Bait

It is illegal to take native crayfish from the wild, and is an offence under national fisheries byelaw to use any crayfish (alive or dead) or any crayfish part as bait.

Don't Introduce Crayfish

It is illegal to introduce non-native crayfish anywhere in England or Wales. To do so could accelerate the spread of disease and introduced populations are extremely difficult to control.

Report any Sightings

If you see a crayfish (in the wild or for sale alive) please contact the Environment Agency on 0845 933 3111 and ask for Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation.

Help us to Save the Native Crayfish!

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www.environment-agency.gov.uk



www.english-nature.org.uk



www.stwater.co.uk



www.uku.fi/english/organizations/IAA/



Protecting Native Crayfish in the Midlands



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A detailed crayfish information booklet and identification guide Freshwater Crayfish in Britain and Ireland is available from Environment Agency offices.

The Native Crayfish

Britain's freshwaters are home to a single species of crayfish known as the native or white-clawed crayfish.

This fascinating creature is equally at home in still or running freshwater, where it leads a secretive and largely nocturnal existence. Its presence is an indication of good water quality and it plays an important role in the aquatic ecosystem, foraging for a variety of foods from fallen leaves to shrimps and snails, and itself falling prey to larger animals such as heron, trout, chub, eel and otter.

The Midlands has long been a stronghold of the native crayfish, which may still be found in a number of our clean waters including upland streams and lowland rivers, lakes and deep reservoirs.

However, the future of the species in our region is now in doubt, with recent years seeing a decline in numbers both here and in other parts of the country.

The native crayfish is vulnerable to pollution, disturbance and to loss of habitat. It also faces a growing threat from introduced species of non-native or alien crayfish. These species, such as the North American signal crayfish, are often more aggressive and have been illegally introduced to the wild or escaped from crayfish farms and ponds. Non-native crayfish are quite capable of walking overland in their search for a home and will rapidly colonise freshwaters, killing or displacing native crayfish, damaging river banks and disturbing the natural balance of our aquatic systems.

More deadly still, introduced crayfish can carry a virulent disease, known as crayfish plague, which spreads rapidly among our vulnerable native species and can wipe out entire populations of crayfish.

Crayfish in the Midlands

There are known to be at least four species of crayfish living in the Severn and Trent catchment areas:



Native or white-clawed crayfish

Our native crayfish mates in October or November and the female will carry up to 200 eggs until the young hatch in May or June.



Spiny-cheek crayfish

This North American species is now the most abundant crayfish in mainland Europe. Tolerant of less clean waters, this species is a plague carrier, at present known from a single Midlands site. Its spread would threaten natives.



Signal crayfish

Widespread and increasing across the Midlands, this burrowing plague carrying species breeds earlier and grows faster than the native crayfish. Females can produce up to 500 eggs.



Turkish or narrow-clawed crayfish

A native of eastern Europe, this docile species can be a problem when present in large numbers. Like the native, the Turkish crayfish is susceptible to crayfish plague.