



# White-clawed crayfish Biodiversity Action Plan

A Wildthings Species Action Plan  
2006–2010

# Action Plan

## Introduction

The white-clawed crayfish is the only species of freshwater crayfish native to the UK. It is widespread in clean, calcareous streams, rivers and lakes throughout England and Wales but is now in serious decline due to the introduced fungal disease known as 'crayfish plague'. The disease is principally spread by non-native crayfish species but spores of the fungus can also be transmitted in water, on damp equipment and mud, and attached to the mucus or scales of fish. The white-clawed crayfish prefers rivers and streams without too much sediment and is particularly sensitive to biocides and other pollutants. It is listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and is also included in Annexes II and V of the European Habitats Directive. This Directive requires the designation of protected areas (Special Areas of Conservation) for species in Annex II.



## Current status and distribution

The distribution of the white-clawed crayfish in the South West is generally localised to areas where the geology is made up of calcareous rock. The species formerly had a wide distribution in England and Wales but has suffered a massive decline (30% of its range) since the 1970's largely as a result of the impact of crayfish plague. Data for the 1990s indicated only two locations in the Bath and North East Somerset unitary authority area where native crayfish were known to be present.

A survey for native crayfish in the Bath and North East Somerset area was undertaken by the Avon Wildlife Trust in the autumn of 2002 with funding from the Environment Agency. The results of this survey were disappointing. The healthiest known population on the River Chew no longer appeared to be present. This has been corroborated by another surveyor undertaking work for the Environment Agency's Flood Defence department. The reason for this apparent loss of native crayfish is unclear and there is a need to undertake investigations to try and find out what may have happened.

However in 2004 there were reports of the native crayfish in the Wellow Brook and also on the River Chew. These sightings have yet to be verified.

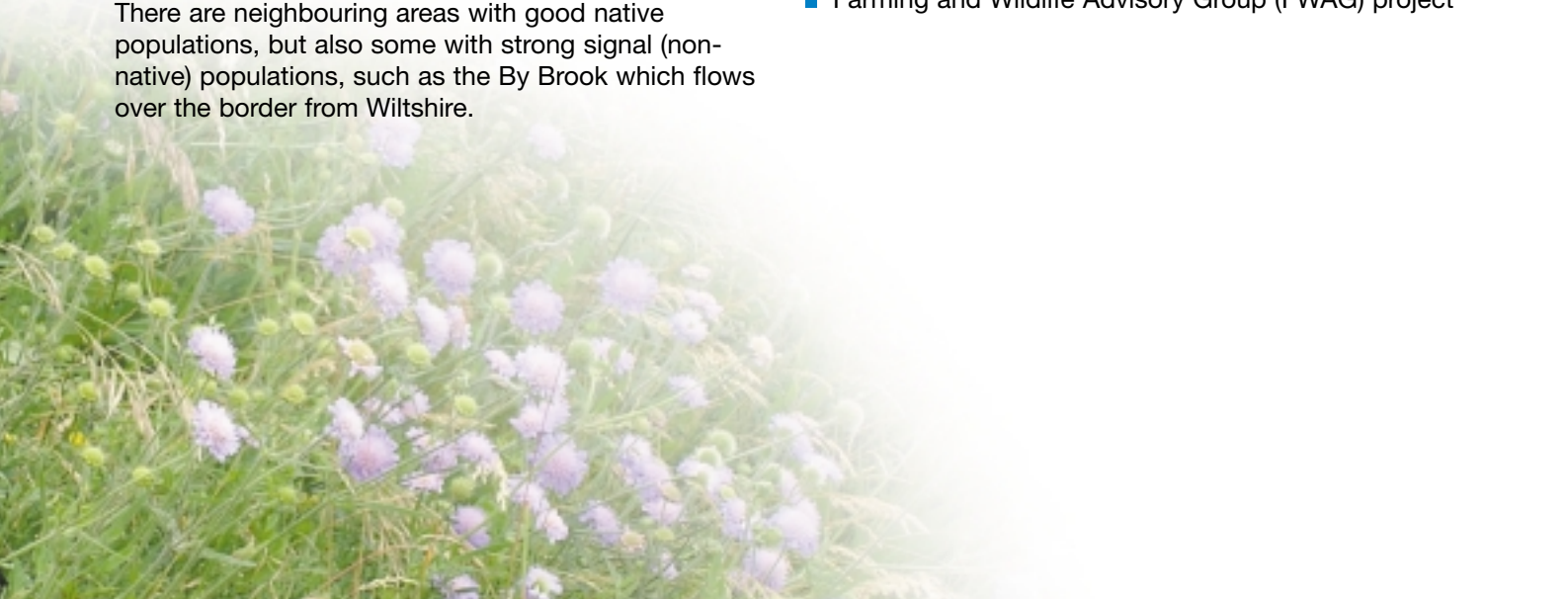
There are neighbouring areas with good native populations, but also some with strong signal (non-native) populations, such as the By Brook which flows over the border from Wiltshire.

## Current factors causing loss or decline

- Crayfish plague
- Direct competition from non-native commercially farmed crayfish species for food and habitat
- Pollution and poor water quality, particularly sheep dip chemicals and other pesticides, and sewage
- Habitat modification, river management and development works resulting in sediment release downstream and direct loss of habitat
- Water abstraction

## Current Action in Bath and North East Somerset

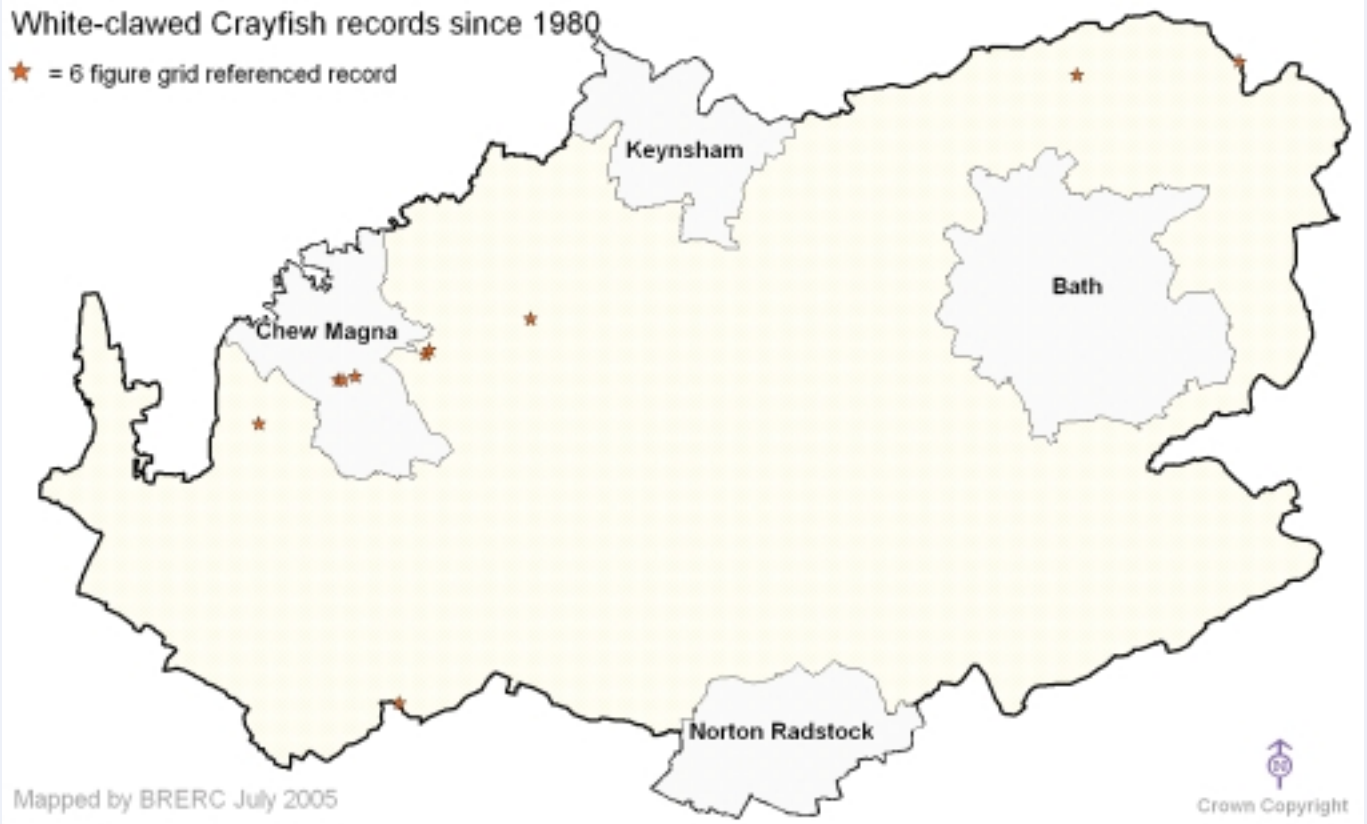
- Collation and management of distribution data at the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)
- Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT) survey – 2002
- The white-clawed crayfish is legally protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and also under this Act it is illegal to release, or allow to escape into the wild, signal and other non-native crayfish species.
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) project



## Distribution map

### White-clawed Crayfish records since 1980

★ = 6 figure grid referenced record



## Action plan objectives and targets

- 1 Establish the current status of the native crayfish in Bath and North East Somerset
- 2 Halt further decline in crayfish populations by ensuring existing populations are protected
- 3 Raise awareness of plight of native crayfish in Bath and North East Somerset and the wider area
- 4 Provide advice to riparian landowners and anglers with regard to good practice for land management and spread of crayfish plague
- 5 Identify new target sites suitable for re-introduction
- 6 Update the records held by the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre for native and non-native crayfish
- 7 Identify causes of recent losses of white-clawed crayfish sites



## Proposed actions with lead agencies

Action	Lead	Objectives	Outputs	Target Date
A. Investigate unofficial records	AWT EA	1,2,6	Knowledge of where existing populations are, data derived from survey used to inform planning and consenting processes, data supplied to BRERC to update records, sites targeted for habitat management	2006
B. Investigate survey findings	EA	7	Explanation for loss of native crayfish	2006
C. Discuss feasibility of re-introduction	EA AWT	5	Identify potential re-introduction sites	By 2007
D. Provide advice to riparian landowners on habitat management	EA AWT B&NES FWAG	2,3,4,5	Encourage good practice in habitat management, raise awareness amongst landowners, protect existing populations	On-going
E. Ensure anglers are made aware of risks of spreading crayfish plague	EA angling-associations	2,3,4	Ensure prevention of spread of plague, protect existing populations through awareness of how disease is spread	On-going
F. Increase public awareness	Wild things	3,6	Day out for members of public to look at crayfish, encourage recording and provision of records to BRERC and EA	2006 onwards
G. Ensure appropriate habitat management and protection of crayfish sites through planning and Agency consenting process	B&NES EA EN	2,4	Encourage good habitat management, ensure existing populations are protected	2006 onwards
H. Achieve and implement local development framework policies to protect and enhance the white clawed crayfish	B&NES	2	Crayfish sites safeguarded	ongoing

**AWT** – Avon Wildlife Trust

**B&NES** – Bath & North East Somerset Council

**BRERC** – Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre

**FWAG** – Farming Wildlife Advisory Group

**Wildthings** – Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership for the B&NES area