



Ark sites for crayfish

Ark sites are vital in helping to prevent the extinction of the White-clawed crayfish in the UK



The White-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is the only native crayfish in the UK, and our largest freshwater invertebrate. However, because of human actions it has declined across England and Wales. Today the White-clawed crayfish is under threat from:

- **Invasive non-native crayfish** including the American Signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*). These introduced species disperse widely and are able to out-compete White-clawed crayfish for food and habitat.
- **Crayfish plague** a fungal disease, frequently carried by American Signal crayfish, which rapidly kills White-clawed crayfish.
- **Loss of habitat or habitat quality** by pollution or physical damage.

Time is running out for our White-clawed crayfish. Unless measures are taken to help the species immediately it will continue to decrease in range and it may be lost altogether in England and Wales during the next few decades.

AN 'ARK' FOR CONSERVING CRAYFISH

The threatened White-clawed crayfish has been identified as a priority species for conservation in the UK. Action is already being taken to address the causes of decline, including improving habitat

quality. Despite this populations are still being lost at an alarming rate.

White-clawed crayfish cannot survive where there are non-native crayfish. Most of their existing range has already been lost, or will be lost in future, as the uncontrollable onward march of invading populations of non-native crayfish spread through most river catchments.

One approach to conserving the White-clawed crayfish is to establish isolated new refuge sites - known as "Ark sites" - where new populations can be established, safe from non-native crayfish and crayfish plague.

An Ark site for White-clawed crayfish is an isolated, self-contained site with running water, still water, or both, which can support a healthy, self-sustaining population of White-clawed crayfish with little need for ongoing management.

Although there are a few existing Ark sites, there is an urgent need for many more to be established to safeguard the long-term survival of White-clawed crayfish across England and Wales. Setting up Ark sites can be straightforward and inexpensive, and can provide a sustainable future for the White-clawed crayfish in the UK.

WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH FACTFILE



The White-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is a globally threatened species which is a conservation priority in Europe and the UK, and has been identified as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The White-clawed crayfish is the UK's largest freshwater invertebrate and is our only native crayfish species. The adult crayfish can grow to around 12cm long. White-clawed crayfish can live for more than 10 years, and usually reach sexual maturity after three to four years.

White-clawed crayfish are omnivorous but the bulk of their diet is made up of other, smaller, invertebrates. They are a key-stone species of rivers and streams, indicating good environmental quality, and are food for larger animals such as otters.

SELECTING ARK SITES

A number of conservation organisations including Buglife are working to identify and establish Ark sites in key areas for White-clawed crayfish conservation.

A suitable Ark site for White-clawed crayfish should:

- have permanent water (either running, still, or both)
- be free of Signal crayfish and other non-native crayfish species
- be isolated from the threat of colonisation by non-native crayfish
- have suitable water quality and appropriate White-clawed crayfish habitat
- be sustainable in the long term.

Potential sites include: flooded quarries, pits and other former aggregates and minerals workings; isolated lakes; and isolated streams above high waterfalls or which flow directly into the sea. White-clawed crayfish need help now - Ark sites will help to safeguard their long-term survival across their UK range.

WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH AND THE LAW

White-clawed crayfish are protected under UK wildlife and fisheries legislation, which means that a number of licences are required to trap White-clawed and other species and/or move them to new sites. Professional advice must be sought when planning Ark sites.



Further information on Ark sites and crayfish conservation:

- Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust: www.buglife.org.uk
- Environment Agency: www.environment-agency.gov.uk
- Wildlife Trusts: www.wildlifetrusts.org
- Natural England: www.naturalengland.org.uk
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan: www.ukbap.org.uk

More detailed guidance on how to set up an Ark site can also be found in: Ark sites for White-clawed crayfish – guidance for the aggregates industry (2009) by Whitehouse, Peay & Kindemba, Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust.



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