



WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH

United Kingdom

The white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is the UK's only indigenous freshwater crayfish and is a keystone species of our aquatic habitats. It is globally Endangered throughout its range, both within mainland Europe and the UK.

Since the 1970s there has been more than a 70% decline in this species in south west England due to habitat fragmentation, pollution and, most importantly, the introduction of the non-native invasive signal crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus*. This invasive species not only predated our native species but carries crayfish plague, a disease which is lethal to white-clawed crayfish.

In 2008, in response to this decline, the South West Crayfish Partnership was set up including Bristol Zoological Society, The Environment Agency, Cefas, Wildlife Trusts, Buglife and associated partners. They developed four main conservation strands in an attempt to halt the decline of the species within the south west: establishing ark sites, a captive-breeding hatchery, a communication strategy and an invasive crayfish control programme. Since the partnership's inception, 17 ark sites have been established within six counties, which provide safe refuges for threatened crayfish. More than 4,000 captive-bred crayfish have been produced by Bristol Zoo's hatchery for ark site release and river supplementation. Over 5.5M people, such as water-way users and key stakeholders, have been targeted to ensure that rivers and lakes are used carefully and that the risk of spreading both disease and invasive species is reduced. In addition, the first in-situ signal crayfish control programme has been initiated to help assess the most effective method to reduce invasive crayfish species. The South West Crayfish Partnership has successfully increased the native white-clawed crayfish populations within the south west by over 75% and forms an effective working model for crayfish conservation within the UK and mainland Europe.

Five year objectives:

- Biennial monitoring of current south-west white-clawed crayfish ark sites
- Monitor native crayfish populations within the southwest
- Identify a minimum of two Somerset signal crayfish populations and trial a control programme
- Identify and set up a minimum of two white-clawed crayfish ark sites
- Establish a national crayfish hatchery / field station
- Provide practitioner support and training
- Publish aquaculture guidelines for white-clawed crayfish



CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Long term population monitoring

Monitoring established ark sites, native populations and crayfish invasions in order to respond appropriately to change and ensure conservation actions are appropriate



Habitat restoration

During ark site establishment, the aquatic habitat is enhanced to ensure that it is optimal for crayfish and other ecosystem species



Conservation breeding

Supplementing wild populations through captive-breeding and release



Promoting pro-conservation behaviour

Using a combination of displays, outreach events, and publications, and promoting crayfish conservation and Defra's Check, Clean, Dry campaign



Policy, advocacy and action planning

Produce clear short, mid and long-term strategies and biodiversity action plans for each river catchment

