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Wroxton MotoCross Circuit – Mitigation Measures for Great Crested Newts

Introduction

Great Crested Newts are present on the site as results from an eDNA survey showed in May 2021 (see below).

The two ponds within the site boundary of the Motocross Circuit both scored as 'good' habitat for Great Crested Newts (GCN) following a Habitat Suitability Index survey. Neighbouring land to the north contains two ponds within broad-leaved woodland which represents good terrestrial habitat for GCN.

Suitable terrestrial habitat within the development site is quite limited owing to the disturbed nature of the race circuit with extensive areas of bare ground, which is not considered attractive foraging and commuting habitat for GCN. The grassland at the southern end of the site which is used for car parking and camping is not considered to be good potential GCN terrestrial habitat as the sward is improved and regularly mown and grazed. There is potential to enhance terrestrial habitat for GCN and other wildlife on grassland at the north eastern side of the site which is described further below.

GCN eDNA Survey of ponds

On 20th May 2021, an eDNA survey was conducted of the two ponds on site and two ponds that lie on neighbouring land to the north of the motocross circuit.

Results for the two ponds on neighbouring land were negative for the presence of great crested newts. The smaller pond on site (TN6 in the Extended Phase 1 survey) was found to be positive for the presence of GCN whereas the second larger pond (TN5) was negative. The lack of GCN in three of the four ponds would suggest that there is not a large population of newts in the vicinity. However precautions will need to be taken to ensure the risk of harm to individual GCN is minimised by track activities.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures

In order to minimise the risk of an offence occurring, a 'Statement of Reasonable Avoidance Measures' should be followed during the management of the motocross circuit.

As long as the following measures are fully implemented, no Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations derogation Licence should be necessary. This will ensure that all reasonable efforts have been taken and there will be no reasonable foreseeable likelihood of impacts upon GCN.

The statement of reasonable avoidance measures ensures that:

- Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the risk of GCN being killed or injured is minimal.
- GCN are not significantly disturbed by the works
- There will be no negative effects on the local conservation status of GCN.

If GCN are found which could be affected by the operation/maintenance of the circuit, works should stop immediately and further advice from a Licenced Ecologist should be taken.

- All works on operating and maintainance of the race circuit should be completed during day light hours as newts are more likely to be commuting over the land at night. There should be no vehicle movement on the track after dark.

- The track should be checked in the vicinity of the pond before surfacing works and before racing days begin to ensure no newts remain on the track area. Should any be found an ecologist should be contacted for advice.

- Measures should be put in place during the maintenance of the circuit to discourage GCN from using the site. Piles of rubble, soil, corrugated sheets can be attractive hibernation refuges for GCNs during the autumn-winter months. When these piles are subsequently moved the newts are disturbed. Ensure that from the autumn/winter (September onwards) all loose materials are stored on pallets above the ground so that newts do not use them as hibernation sites. Any rubble or spoil should be placed immediately into skips.

- Keep the timescale of maintenance works to a minimum and ensure that any maintenance works of the two ponds on site is only be conducted from November to early February when newts are most likely to be out of the water and on land. Works must be completed by early February. This reduces the risk to newts moving over land, as does the short duration of any works.

- When carrying out any excavation works on site such as drainage works, cover any likely pitfall traps overnight. Trenches or holes can serve as traps for newts from which they may not be able to not escape. As newts move around mainly at night the covering of such traps prevents them falling in. If trenches and holes are left

overnight leave a ramp so that newts can easily exit. It is good practice to dig a trench and fill back in the same day.

- The pond should **not** be fenced in such a way as to keep GCN out/in.
- Spectators/users of the track should be discouraged from straying onto the vegetation around the ponds or within the mitigation area.

Habitat Enhancement Measures

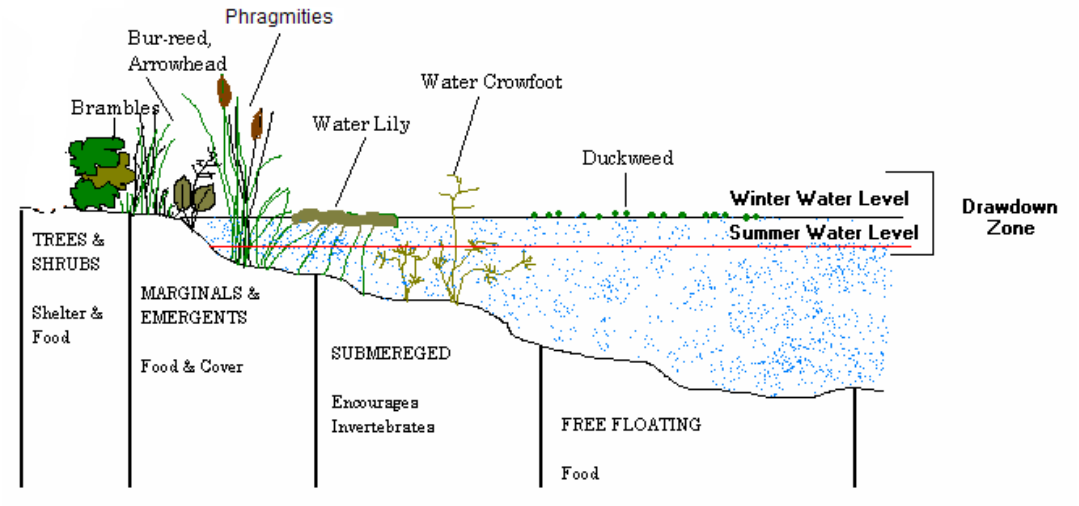
Measures will be taken to enhance the terrestrial habitat within the vicinity. The location of the measures is shown in Figure 1.

Creation and management of aquatic habitat

Two new ponds will be created in the north eastern corner of the site. These will have a water area of between 80 and 100m^2. With the correct design and management, the new ponds will offer the potential to maximise ecological opportunities. The following principles should be incorporated into the design of the pond.

- Shallow margins or shelves to encourage the development of aquatic emergent vegetation.
- Irregular margins to maximise the length of valuable shallow water habitat.
- Do not stock with fish which can reduce the number of aquatic invertebrates and amphibian populations.
- Allow rough grassland and scrub to develop around part of the pond banks to act as cover for any aquatic wildlife entering or emerging from the water.
- Where possible, maintain an open southern bank to allow sunlight to reach the water surface.

Figure 3: *Desirable pond condition with varied depths and habitats for aquatic plant and animal life*



Planting of locally native aquatic plant species should be tailored to providing suitable cover, foraging habitat and egg laying substrate for great crested newts. Dense planting should be avoided and instead space should be allowed for some natural colonisation of species such as brooklime, water forget-me-not and fool's watercress which are already present in the existing ponds on site. Table 1 shows the recommended wetland species for planting which are all locally native, many of which are also beneficial to pollinators/ invertebrates and able to tolerate fluctuating water levels.

Table 1: *Wetland species to be planted around the ponds*

Species	**Latin name**
Common reed	*Phragmites australis*
Gypsywort	*Lycopus eurpaeus*
Hemp agrimony	*Eupatorium cannabinum*
Marsh woundwort	*Caltha palustris*
Lesser pond sedge	*Carex acutiformis*
Yellow flag	*Iris pseudocorus*
Purple loosetrife	*Lythrum salicana*
Water mint	*Mentha aquatica*
Reed canary grass	*Phalaris arundinacea*
Branched bur-reed	*Sparganium erectum*
Marsh woundwort	*Stachys palustris*

Plants should be obtained from a reputable nursery following Flora Locale Code of Practice on native flora, to ensure that invasive plant species are not introduced to the site.

Creation and management of terrestrial habitat

The north eastern section of the circuit represents the most extensive area of semi-improved grassland on site and this area should continue to be grazed by sheep to maintain the floristic value of the sward (TN3 on map). Over grazing should be avoided so as to maintain a varied sward structure with a mosaic of taller and shorter vegetation including occasional gorse scrub which is already naturally regenerating in places.

The grassland at the foot of the slope which lies adjacent to the watercourse should be left ungrazed to allow taller vegetation and a litter layer to develop which will provide greater cover for newts as commuting and foraging habitat. This margin of tall vegetation will link to the northernmost pond (TN5). The planting of the new native hedgerow along the eastern boundary will provide both foraging habitat and commuting/migration routes for newts into the wider countryside.

Construction of hibernaculum

A hibernaculum will be created adjacent to Pond (TN5), composed of inert rubble and wood, following standard guidance (Froglife 2001).

References

Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth.

Figure 1: Map of Habitat Enhancement Proposals for Great Created Newts