

# SAVE OUR WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH: YOU CAN HELP!

**Our rare and elusive white-clawed crayfish is in danger – and you can help protect them!**

## WHITE-CLAWED CRAYFISH

In our rivers and streams lives an increasingly rare species which can often be hard to see - but plays a vital part in maintaining the health of our precious water ecosystems.

The white-clawed crayfish is the only species of crayfish native to the British Isles and it is in danger of extinction!

It is Britain's largest freshwater invertebrate (an animal without a backbone) and looks like a small lobster. It is mostly nocturnal and lives in fresh-water, in river banks, under stones and tree roots, feeding on natural debris and small invertebrates. This crayfish also provides an important food source for fish, otters and even water voles.

## ALIEN INVADERS

In the 1970's, a new 'alien', non-native species of crayfish was introduced to the UK. American signal crayfish are larger and more aggressive than our own native species and they easily out-compete our white-clawed crayfish for food and habitat.

American signal crayfish have spread into the wild around the UK, either by themselves (crayfish can walk on land!) or through people moving them to new waters, either deliberately or by accident.

## THE PLAGUE

An even bigger threat to our native species is from crayfish plague (actually a water mould) which the American signal crayfish are mostly resistant to.

If this plague reaches our white-clawed crayfish, there is no cure and it could wipe out 100% of the population!

**BUT WE CAN ALL WORK TOGETHER TO AVOID THIS.**



We have received reports of invasive signal crayfish in the River Coquet. They are also in other nearby rivers such as the Pont and Blyth. With such close proximity to important white-clawed crayfish populations in the River Wansbeck and other Northumberland rivers, such as the Aln, it is more important than ever to follow biosecurity measures.

## PLEASE FOLLOW 'CHECK CLEAN DRY'

The best way to prevent the spread of the 'plague' and the spread of American signal crayfish, is to make sure that all footwear, equipment and vehicles are checked, cleaned and dry before entering any water, even small streams AND before moving from one body of water to another.

For more information visit

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry/>

## REPORTING AN INCIDENT

If you see dead or distressed white-clawed crayfish please call the Environment Agency's incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60** (24-hour service).

If you think you see an invasive signal crayfish in the River Coquet or the River Wansbeck (and their tributaries) please contact the Environmental Records Centre North East (ERIC), information on reporting sightings is available here:

<https://www.ericnortheast.org.uk/recording-wildlife-2/>

Please do not handle or remove live or dead crayfish. It is illegal to do this without a licence. Our native species are protected and American signal crayfish are listed as an invasive species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to release, or allow them to escape to the wild.