

Crayfish trapping – what you need to know

The trapping of crayfish can be used to achieve a number of things, however there are risks associated with it. You should be aware of these risks before undertaking any trapping operation, this information sheet explains what these risks are and the potential benefits of trapping as well as the various permissions you may require to undertake such an operation.

Great Britain has only one species of native crayfish the white clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*). However since the mid 1970s a number of other crayfish species have been brought into this country and have got into, and are now thriving in, the wild. The most commonly found of these non-native crayfish is the signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), which has colonised much of the south of England. The impact signal crayfish have is:

- Signal crayfish may carry a disease (crayfish plague) that kills our native crayfish.
- They out compete native crayfish.
- Signal crayfish can reduce the numbers and range of other animals and plants.
- They burrow into banks causing damage.
- At high numbers they are also a significant nuisance to anglers.

So surely we should all go out and trap as many signal crayfish as possible to eliminate them. Unfortunately it's not quite as simple as that. Trapping is good at catching large crayfish, it is not very good at catching small crayfish. In some cases the number of crayfish has increased following trapping, as the small ones have been left behind to breed. Trapping cannot be used to eliminate a signal crayfish population. However it can be used for:

- Monitoring native and non-native crayfish for conservation/scientific purposes.
- Harvesting signal crayfish for food.
- Reducing the number of signal crayfish.

It is the last of these that is the hardest to achieve.

If you are planning to reduce the number of signal crayfish by either trapping them yourself or employing a company to do it for you there are a number of things you should consider first. These are:

- Once trapping is stopped numbers of crayfish will increase. Can you afford to keep up the trapping effort?
- The number and size of the crayfish caught must be monitored to ensure the trapping does not increase the size of the population. Can this be done if there are lots of people trapping on one stretch of water?

- Hundreds of kg if not tonnes of crayfish may have to be removed to have any noticeable benefit, especially on rivers and canals. Can you dispose of this quantity of crayfish both humanely and safely?

These points should also be taken into consideration when permitting people to harvest crayfish for food from your waters.

The Environment Agency wants to work with you to monitor native and non-native crayfish and advise you on the best course of action to take to tackle non-native populations. If you are considering trapping crayfish, or the anglers who fish the water you own or manage are, then contact your local Environment Agency Fisheries Officer for further information. Contact details for all the organisations referred to are at the bottom of this page.

Within England and Wales there are a number of permissions that you may require to trap and/or remove crayfish species, these include:

- The consent of the Environment Agency to use a trap to remove crayfish from any inland waters. To apply for this consent an application form (FR2) needs to be completed and sent to us for determination. Available from the efishbusiness website.
- A licence from English Nature (EN)/Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) for handling our native white clawed crayfish. Available from EN/CCW, we would also ensure that this licence was in place before issuing consent to trap native crayfish.
- The permission of the land owner and/or owner of the fishing rights.
- If you wish to hold and keep live non-native crayfish you may also require a licence from the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Available from the efishbusiness website.

Further information on the identification and distribution of crayfish in Great Britain is available in our leaflet titled “Freshwater Crayfish in Britain and Ireland”.

Contact details:

Environment Agency – 08708 506506, www.environment-agency.gov.uk

English Nature – www.english-nature.org.uk

Countryside Council for Wales – www.ccw.gov.uk
www.efishbusiness.co.uk