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White-clawed crayfish - *Austropotamobius pallipes*

This crustacean resembles a small lobster, but occurs in freshwater. It averages around 10 cm in length, and is brown on top and pale below, with white undersides to the claws.

White-clawed crayfish mostly live in clear, hard water rivers and streams, where they live under stones, but they sometimes occur in lakes and ponds. It feeds mainly at night, preying or scavenging on snails, insect larvae and dead or dying fish. Female crayfish carry their fertilized eggs in clusters under the abdomen from autumn until late spring / early summer the next year. The young that hatch resemble the adults in form except that they have more domed shells, and they cling on to their mother for about 10 days until their first moult.

The white-clawed crayfish is the only species of crayfish native to the UK, but it has declined considerably since the 1970s because of habitat modifications and particularly competition and disease spread from introduced species. The main competitor is thought to be the signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), which not only eats the same food as the white-clawed crayfish, but also grows faster and may eat smaller white-clawed

crayfish. The most devastating impact from the signal crayfish is that it carries crayfish plague (*Aphanomyces astaci*), a fungal disease that can wipe out populations of white-clawed crayfish. Signal crayfish have wider claws (the large pincers at the front) than the white-clawed crayfish, and the claws are typically red and blue.

The white-clawed crayfish is classified as Globally Threatened, with the UK containing around a quarter of the total world population. The species is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 against taking and sale, and is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Candidate SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) to conserve key populations of this species have also been proposed by the statutory nature conservation agencies to meet the requirements of the EC Habitats Directive.

Within Kent, the white-clawed crayfish has been recorded from the River Darent, River Stour and River Medway Catchments, within which populations are now largely limited to the headwaters. Recent records also exist for the Seabrook Sream near Hythe. The main threats in Kent are thought to be crayfish plague, which can



be transmitted by water, fish and damp equipment, pollution and drought. As further developments take place in Kent, the effects of drought and greater abstraction of water could increase the risk that this species declines yet further. The white-clawed crayfish is listed in the Kent Red Data Book on account of its UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species status.

No sites in Kent have been designated specifically for white-clawed crayfish. Wetland habitat improvements carried out along the rivers Medway, Darent and Stour may contribute to better habitat for the species, and it is hoped that agri-environment schemes will reduce the level of nutrients entering rivers and hence improve water quality. The Environment Agency are currently working to locate remaining populations in Kent and identify suitable sites for species protection and recovery.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

UK Biodiversity Action Plan:

www.ukbap.org.uk/ukplans.aspx?ID=124

Environment Agency: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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

Kent Wildlife Trust: www.kentwildlife.org.uk

Kent Biodiversity Action Plan: www.kentbap.org.uk

The Kent Red Data Book, available from

Kent County Council: www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity

Ecology of the White-clawed crayfish, available from:

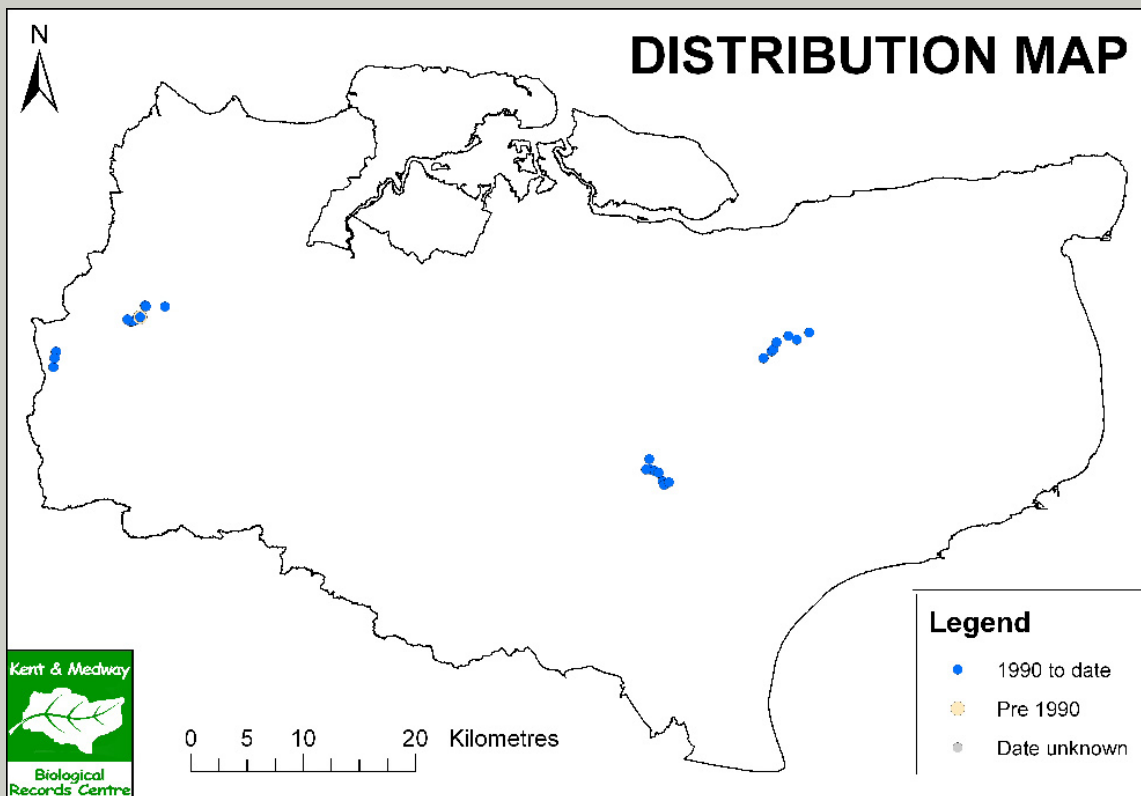
www.english-nature.org.uk/LIFEinUKRivers/species/crayfish.pdf

Kent Landscape Information System:

www.kent.gov.uk/klis

Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre:

www.kmbrc.org.uk



Data courtesy of the Environment Agency