



REQUEST 18662

Under the FOI Act 2000, we are requesting the following information regarding railway or track maintenance work at Haigh Woodland Park, particularly in the area adjacent to the water tower and small pond near location:
///money.estate.closes (What3Words).

We understand that track work has occurred in this location at various stages, including a volunteer-led effort in 2020 and more recent activity in 2024–2025.

Please provide:

1. Copies of any ecological surveys or environmental assessments conducted prior to works on the railway or track in this area, covering both past (2020) and recent works.
2. Any documentation relating to the presence or suspected presence of protected species, including Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*), in this area.
3. Correspondence or reports between the Council, its contractors, or Natural England regarding mitigation licences or ecological conditions imposed before starting work.
4. The name of the organisation or contractor responsible for compliance with ecological legislation in this location.

This request relates to land that is part of or adjacent to a recognised public asset and designated heritage zone. If this request should be redirected to a different public body or contractor, please confirm this.

RESPONSE

1. Please see attached report – please note that this report does not relate to the new pond within the lower walled garden.
2. Please see attached report.
3. This correspondence does not exist.
4. Wigan Council.

Folio No: 3008-2025
Purchase Order: SCIN-41162
Contact: Wigan Council
Issue Date: 06.08.2025
Received Date: 26.06.2025

GCN Report

Technical Report



SureScreen Scientifics

Folio No: 3008-2025
Purchase Order: SC N-41162
Contact: Wigan Council
Issue Date: 06.08.2025
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GCN eDNA Analysis

Summary

When great crested newts (GCN), *Triturus cristatus*, inhabit a pond, they continuously release small amounts of their DNA into the environment. By collecting and analyzing water samples, we can detect these small traces of environmental DNA (eDNA) to confirm GCN habitation or establish GCN absence.

Results

Lab ID	Site Name	OS Reference	Degradation Check	Inhibition Check	Result	Positive Replicates
GCN25 8700	Walled Garden Pond	53.57092 N, 2.60287 W	Pass	Pass	Negative	0/12

Matters affecting result: none

Reported by: 

Approved by: 



Methodology

The samples detailed above have been analyzed for the presence of GCN eDNA following the protocol stated in DEFRA WC1067 'Analytical and methodological development for improved surveillance of the Great Crested Newt, Appendix 5.' (Biggs et al. 2014). Each of the 6 sub-sample tubes are first centrifuged and pooled together into a single sample tube which then undergoes DNA extraction. The extracted sample is then analyzed using real-time PCR (qPCR), which uses species-specific molecular markers to amplify GCN DNA within a sample. These markers are unique to GCN DNA, meaning that there should be no detection of closely related species.

If GCN DNA is present, the DNA is amplified up to a detectable level, resulting in positive species detection. If GCN DNA is not present then amplification does not occur, and a negative result is recorded. Analysis of eDNA requires attention to detail to prevent the risk of contamination. True positive controls, negative controls, and spiked synthetic DNA are included in every analysis and these have to be correct before any result is declared and reported. Stages of the DNA analysis are also conducted in different buildings at our premises for added analytical security.

SureScreen Scientifics Ltd is ISO9001 accredited and participates in Natural England's proficiency testing scheme for GCN eDNA testing.

Interpretation of Results

Sample Integrity Check:

When samples are received in the laboratory, they are inspected for any tube leakage, suitability of sample (not too much mud or weed etc.) and absence of any factors that could potentially lead to inconclusive results. Any samples which fail this test are rejected and eliminated before analysis.

Degradation Check:

Pass/Fail. Analysis of the spiked DNA marker to see if there has been degradation of the kit or sample between the date it was made to the date of analysis. Degradation of the spiked DNA marker may lead indicate a risk of false negative results.

Inhibition Check:

Pass/Fail. The presence of inhibitors within a sample is assessed using a DNA marker. If inhibition is detected, samples are purified and re-analyzed. Inhibitors cannot always be removed, if the inhibition check fails, the sample should be re-collected.

Result:

Presence of GCN eDNA (Positive/Negative/Inconclusive)

Positive: GCN DNA was identified within the sample, indicative of GCN presence within the sampling location at the time the sample was taken or within the recent past at the sampling location.

Positive Replicates: Number of positive qPCR replicates out of a series of 12. If one or more of these are found to be positive the pond is declared positive for GCN presence. It may be assumed that small fractions of positive analyses suggest low level presence, but this cannot currently be used for population studies. In accordance with the WC1067 Natural England protocol, even a score of 1/12 is declared positive. 0/12 indicates negative GCN presence.

Negative: GCN eDNA was not detected or is below the threshold detection level and the test result should be considered as evidence of GCN absence, however, does not exclude the potential for GCN presence below the limit of detection.

Inconclusive: Controls indicate inhibition or degradation of the sample, resulting in the inability to provide conclusive evidence for GCN presence or absence.

