



## Crayfish in Crisis

The rate of loss of White-clawed crayfish in England and Wales is rapid and shows no sign of slowing as Signal crayfish and other introduced crayfish invade more rivers. If this pattern continues, there is a high risk that White-clawed crayfish will become extinct in most of their current range in England and Wales over the next 20 years.

### Crayfish plague

One of the major reasons for the decline in White-clawed crayfish is the spread of 'Crayfish Plague'. The cause of this disease is a water mould called *Aphanomyces astaci*, which attacks the soft tissue of crayfish. It is carried and spread mostly by Signal crayfish (*Pacifasticus leniusculus*), which are unaffected by it. However other introduced crayfish species do carry plague, including the Red swamp (*Procambarus clarkii*) and the Spiny-cheeked (*Orconectes limosus*). Our White-clawed crayfish are not immune to plague and once introduced it rapidly kills off all that are present in an area in just a few weeks. Crayfish plague is easily moved between sites as it can be transported on wet angling equipment and wet clothes. The spores of crayfish plague can even remain active on damp gear for as long as 22 days. For more information about Non-native crayfish and disease, [click here](#).

### Stopping the spread of crayfish plague

All waterway users need to be aware about good practice to help prevent the spread of invasive crayfish species and diseases. Crayfish plague can be easily spread between sites on wet angling kit or water sports equipment. If you use rivers and lakes either as a walker, angler or for other activities (canoeists, divers, gorge walkers etc.), there are some simple things that you can do to help to prevent the spread of plague such as following the [Check, Clean, Dry code](#) in order to **Stop the Spread of Crayfish Plague**.

# STOP THE SPREAD



Are you unknowingly spreading invasive species on your water sports equipment and clothing?

Invasive species can affect fish and other wildlife, restrict navigation, clog up propellers and be costly to manage. You can help protect the water sports you love by following three simple steps when you leave the water.

**CHECK**

**Check** your equipment and clothing for live organisms - particularly in areas that are damp or hard to inspect.

**CLEAN**

**Clean** and wash all equipment, footwear and clothing thoroughly.

If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them.

**DRY**

**Dry** all equipment and clothing - some species can live for many days in moist conditions.

Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.

For more information go to [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) and search for **Check Clean Dry**



Anglers must never use any crayfish as bait, live or dead as this is illegal and could spread crayfish plague. If you accidentally catch a crayfish, you should put it back where you found it. If you are responsible for part of a river or on-line lake and you intend to stock it with fish in areas with White-claw populations, the fish stock should not come from areas with Signal crayfish. If you find a crayfish next to a water course, see the [Crayfish FAQ's](#) pdf for further advice.

## **Non-native, invasive crayfish**

The other effect of introduced species is that a lot of them have big appetites and they compete with our White-claws for shelter and food when they are present in the same area. The introduced crayfish grow bigger and faster, produce more young and are more aggressive too. As a result even if White-claws are not killed-off by plague they will be lost from an area by being out-competed by other crayfish in just a few years.

There are [six species of non-native crayfish](#) that can be found in parts of England, Wales and Scotland. The vast majority of these species are hugely detrimental to White-clawed crayfish, our aquatic ecology and the very structure of our rivers and streams.

There are also some useful species guides and factsheets on some of the most common crayfish, both native and non-native, found in the UK today:

[http://www.nobanis.org/globalassets/speciesinfo/p/pacifastacus-leniusculus/pacifastacus\\_leniusculus.pdf](http://www.nobanis.org/globalassets/speciesinfo/p/pacifastacus-leniusculus/pacifastacus_leniusculus.pdf)

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm>

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