

# Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Conserving, enhancing and promoting the Stour Valley**

**Countryside Partnership Completes its 100th Wildlife Pond**

A monumental milestone has been reached by Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership as it completes its 100th wildlife pond for Great Crested Newts.

The Ashford-based not-for-profit conservation organisation has been one of Natural England’s habitat delivery bodies since 2018 involved in pond restoration and creation for our only native newt with European Protected Species status. This work is part of the District Level Licensing Scheme for Great Crested Newts.

The current excavations at the farmland site in Smarden are unusual as they involve restoring two large ‘ghost’ ponds – ponds documented on an 1871 map but disappeared when the field was used solely for growing crops. Now the current conservation-minded landowners are in the process of arable reversion, not only restoring the ponds with the help of this scheme, but also creating a scrape for birds and a brand new woodland. Some significant historical finds have also been found from Roman coins to Tudor pottery, prompting the attendance of an archaeologist.

Each 500m2+ pond was restored to its original size and shape by specialist contractors, FGS Pilcher, who made them wildlife-friendly by forming shallow sloping sides with a deepest point of 2.5m and shelving for aquatic plants to eventually root into. This pond work is vital as although Great Crested Newts are widely distributed in the Low Weald, they have suffered major declines in recent years because they prefer mainly larger, deeper farmland ponds for breeding. Many of these have either been filled in, such as this site, or are in a poor state and cannot hold sufficient water.

KSCP has created 45 ponds and restored 55 across Kent under this scheme, which is now in its fourth year. Sarah Harrington-James from KSCP who is delivering the pond project, says: “It’s very rewarding being able to help local GCN populations and boost biodiversity through this Natural England scheme. We regularly survey these ponds and have seen an overall positive uptake in GCN colonisation already.”

**Ends**

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Attachments – Photograph of the current pond works at the site in Smarden. [Less photogenic!]

- Photograph of a previous pond restoration now 2 years on at a separate site in Smarden. [More photogenic!]

**Optional information:**

KSCP conserve, enhance and promote the countryside and urban green space of North East Kent and the Low Weald with a focus on the Stour Valley. This is achieved by working closely with local communities and landowners to promote both landscape and nature conservation and by developing opportunities for interpretation, education, community engagement and countryside access. It operates as a working partnership of sponsoring organisations, staff and local people. Kent County Council administer the Partnership.