

To start an AECS application online, register at:  
<https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics>

To view the complete list of available options and capital items, see:  
<https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/agri-environment-climate-scheme/management-options-and-capital-items/>

Management options and capital items	To secure scoring points for benefiting great crested newt as a Vulnerable Protected Species, your application must include Pond Creation for Wildlife and at least one of the other management options* below:
Arable options	Beetlebanks
Arable options	Grass Strips in Arable Fields
Arable options	Water Margins in Arable Fields
Grassland options	Water Margins in Grassland Fields
Wetland and bog options	Wetland Management
Farmland habitat and feature options	Management or Restoration of Existing Hedgerows
Farmland habitat and feature options	Creation of Hedgerows
Farmland habitat and feature options	Habitat Mosaic Management
Capital items	Pond Creation for Wildlife

\* Several other options and capital items may be beneficial to great crested newt if included as part of an application designed to achieve suitable conditions for this species (but will not automatically secure points). For more information about how AECS options can be used to develop a network of ponds and suitable habitat, see poster on reverse.

#### Additional information

For information on how to identify amphibians, including great crested newts, see <http://www.arc-trust.org/amphibians.html>. For more habitat management advice, see Baker et al (2011), for great crested newt ecology, see Jehle et al (2011) and for more detail about great crested newt distribution in Scotland, see Wilkinson et al (2014).

If you would like assistance with completing your AECS application, we recommend contacting the Scottish Association of Independent Farm Conservation Advisers (SAIFCA) via: [www.saifca.org.uk](http://www.saifca.org.uk)

#### References

- Baker J, Beebee TJC, Buckley J, Gent T and Orchard D (2011) *Amphibian Habitat Management Handbook*. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bournemouth. ISBN: 9780956671714. Free electronic copy available at: [www.arc-trust.org/pdf/amphibian-habitat-management-handbook-full.pdf](http://www.arc-trust.org/pdf/amphibian-habitat-management-handbook-full.pdf)
- Jehle R, Thiesmeier B and Foster J (2011) *The crested newt: a dwindling pond-dweller*. Laurenti: Bielefeld.
- Wilkinson JW, Arnell A, Driver D and Driver B (2014) *Elaborating the Distribution of the great crested newt in Scotland (2010-2011)*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 793. Available at: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2177>

amphibian and reptile  
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Scotland Rural Development Programme

# A guide to Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) options for great crested newts

Use this leaflet to select options to benefit the great crested newt in Scotland

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Great crested newt — adult male



Great crested newt — adult female

## Why do great crested newts matter?

Britain supports internationally important populations of the great crested newt. Although it is a widespread species in England and in parts of Wales, it has a more restricted distribution in Scotland, where it is predominantly found in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, throughout the Central Lowlands and in the Inverness area.

Over the last century it has undergone severe declines across its range, primarily due to loss of habitat. Many populations are becoming isolated and are increasingly vulnerable to extinction.

The great crested newt is a European Protected Species, and is highly protected under European and national legislation. It is listed on the Scottish Biodiversity List, which means it is a priority species for action by the Scottish Government.

## Great crested newts on farmland

Lowland agricultural land is the key habitat for great crested newts. Historically, farming has favoured this species, particularly through the creation of ponds.

Today, funding is available for farmers to manage their land to enhance existing features and create new habitat for the benefit of wildlife, including rare species such as the great crested newt.

## What do great crested newts need?

Great crested newts require aquatic and terrestrial habitats to enable them to breed, forage, disperse and hibernate.

Great crested newts prefer ponds that:

- are open (not heavily shaded)
- are close to other ponds
- do not support fish or ducks
- contain clean water
- contain abundant aquatic vegetation

They also require suitable terrestrial habitat (within a few hundred metres), such as:

- rough grassland, including patches of tall herb and scrub
- hibernation and refuge sites e.g. logs, boulders, drystone walls, native woodland and scrub
- habitat corridors linking breeding ponds and terrestrial areas including hedgerows, scrub, overgrown field margins and rough grassland.

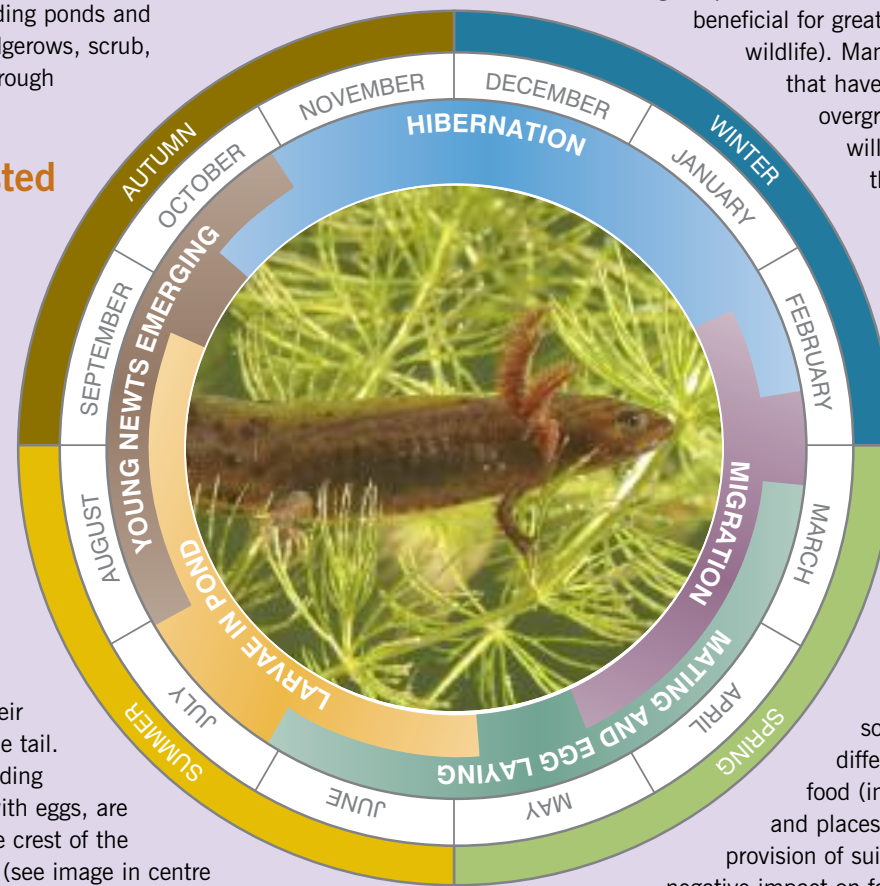
## What do great crested newts look like?

Great crested newts are the largest of Scotland's three native species. In comparison to the smooth newt and the palmate newt, the great crested newt is significantly larger, growing up to 17cm in length.

Great crested newts are dark brown or black in colour with a distinct 'warty' skin. The underside is bright orange with irregular black blotches. In the spring, males develop an impressive jagged crest along their back and a white 'flash' along the tail. Females, particularly in the breeding season when they are swollen with eggs, are bulky in appearance but lack the crest of the male. Great crested newt larvae (see image in centre of calendar) have large, noticeable gills. Unlike larvae of the other native newt species, the tail is mottled with black spots.

## Why choose the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS)?

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme is part of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP). This scheme offers financial support to land managers in Scotland who are registered with Rural Payments and Services. One of the aims of the AECS is to protect and enhance Scotland's natural heritage, including rare wildlife. The great crested newt has been selected under the AECS as a Vulnerable Priority Species (VPS). AECS applications designed to benefit great crested newts will gain points and be considered favourably, if the land is within a priority area for this species and relevant management options are selected.



Great crested newt larva photo © John Baker.

## Are you in a priority area for great crested newts in Scotland?

The map (bottom right) gives a broad indication of the distribution of great crested newts in Scotland. This corresponds closely to the priority area map for great crested newt habitat management on the Rural Payments and Services website (to view this map, enter 'great crested newt map' in the search box at <https://www.ruralpayments.org>).

## Pond creation, restoration and management

The creation of a network of strategically-sited, well-designed ponds within farmland is often hugely beneficial for great crested newts (and other wildlife). Many farms have existing ponds that have silted up or become overgrown. If these are restored, they will make a useful contribution to the network. To secure points under the AECS for great crested newt habitat management, applications must include Pond Creation for Wildlife.

## Terrestrial habitat management

In addition to suitable ponds, great crested newts need suitable habitat on land. It is important that 'wildlife corridors' are available so that newts can move between different areas, there is enough food (insects and other small animals) and places to hide and hibernate. The provision of suitable habitat need not have a negative impact on farm productivity, as newts are good at surviving in marginal land which is often sub-optimal for agriculture. Many farms already have terrestrial features which are useful to newts but could benefit from improved management.

The poster (on reverse) shows how farmland can be managed to support great crested newts and the table on the following page lists the highest priority management options for this species. Support under the AECS is geographically targeted. You can find out which management options are available on your farm by entering your Holding Code/s at: <http://targeting.ruralpayments.org/>.

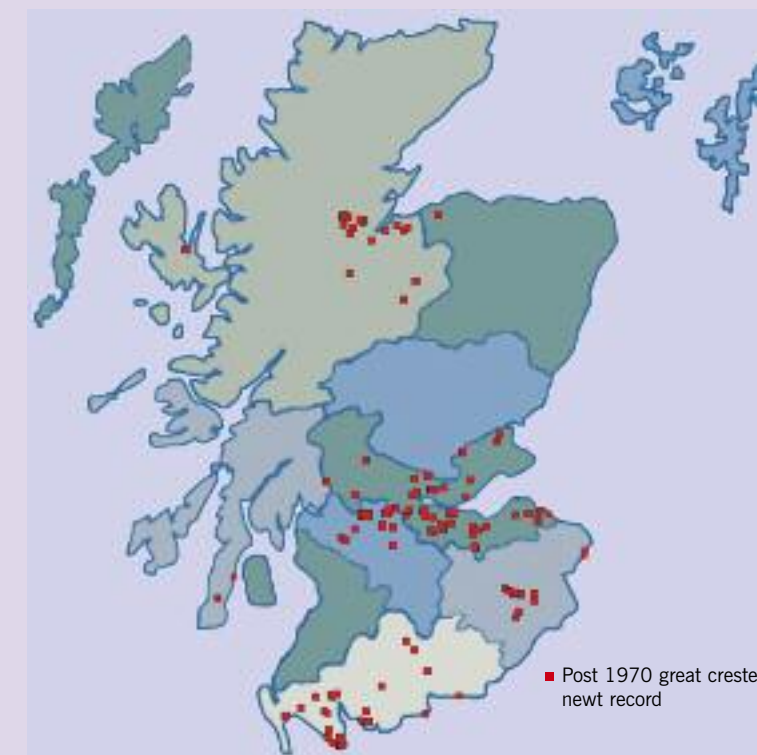


Newly created pond



The same pond after two years

## Distribution of great crested newts throughout Scotland



■ Post 1970 great crested newt record



**Ancient Wood Pasture**  
Newts will use wooded areas when foraging, hiding from predators and hibernating. Deadwood is valuable habitat for populations of invertebrate prey. Ancient Wood Pasture is included in Farmland habitat and feature options.

**Scrub and invasive plants**  
Scrub is useful as a habitat for foraging newts, so it should not be automatically removed. However, the removal of scrub and other vegetation is necessary if it is overshadowing ponds, which need sunlight for great crested newts to breed in them. There are options for controlling invasive plants (Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed and rhododendron) under the Capital items and the Farmland habitats and features options (but note that the area available for rhododendron control does not correspond closely with great crested newt distribution).



**Beetlebanks**  
These provide corridors for newt movement, foraging and can act as hibernation sites. Available under Arable options.



**Unharvested Conservation Headlands**  
Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife (under Arable options) can help to boost invertebrate numbers. Great crested newts eat a wide range of invertebrates.



**Water Margins in Arable or Grassland fields**  
Water margins in fields provide useful habitat and make it easier for newts to disperse and colonise new areas, especially if a strip of rough grassland is retained alongside the water. Water margin options are listed under Arable options and Grassland options.

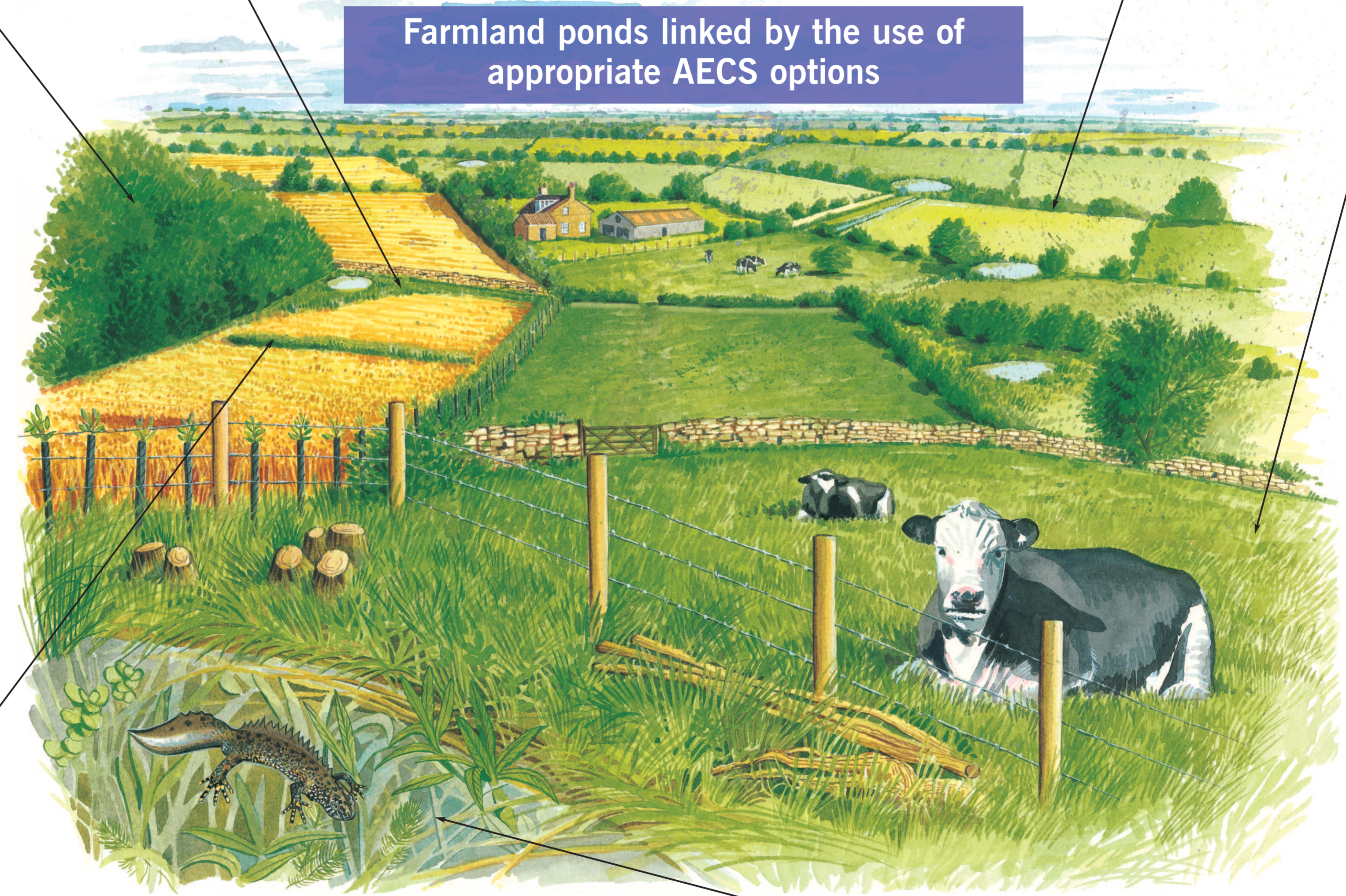


**Hedgerows**  
Hedgerows can also provide very useful corridors for newts moving between fields. There are two relevant options under Farmland habitat and feature options, namely Management or Restoration of Hedgerows and Creation of Hedgerows. Coppicing of Hedges and Laying of Hedges (listed under Capital items) can also be included, if combined with Management or Restoration of Hedgerows.



**Species-rich Grassland**  
Newts use areas of rough grassland for foraging, dispersal and hibernation. Increasing floral diversity will help to enhance populations of invertebrate prey. A tussocky sward, favoured by both newts and insects, can be created through extensive cattle grazing. Reductions in fertiliser application can help to protect watercourses and ponds. Under Grassland options, select Species-rich Grassland Management and under Capital items, select Species-rich Grassland Restoration or Species-rich Grassland Management.

**Wetland Management**  
Great crested newts use reedbeds, marshes and other wetland habitat. Several capital items can be used to create more wetland and help great crested newts, including: Ditch blocking – Plastic Piling Dams, Moving or Realigning Ditches and Wetland Creation – Field Drain Breaking. Peaty, acidic habitat is not ideal for great crested newts, so Ditch Blocking – Peat Dams is not recommended.



**Farmland ponds linked by the use of appropriate AECS options**



**Pond Creation for Wildlife**  
Newts breed in ponds during the spring. The existence of a cluster of ponds will help to strengthen the population. It is essential to provide areas of foraging habitat nearby, such as scrub, rough grassland, hedgerows or woodland. Pond Creation for Wildlife (under Capital items) is essential in order to secure points for benefiting great crested newts as part of an AECS application.



- = Primary options which score AECS points for great crested newts
- = secondary, non-scoring options which are also beneficial.