

# North American Signal Crayfish (NASC)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What are North American signal crayfish, and where are they found?

North American Signal crayfish are a very aggressive and highly adaptable freshwater species which can be easily identified by their lobster like appearance, and can be 2-15cm in length.

Signal crayfish are not native to Scotland. They were introduced to Britain in the 1970s and are now commonly found in waterways throughout England and parts of Wales. They were first formally recorded in Scotland during 1995 and have since been recorded from Galloway in the south, to Inverness-shire in the north at a variety of locations including running and standing waters.



### Why are they a problem?

Signal crayfish are one of many non-native freshwater species in Scotland which have found their way here by human intervention. A large proportion of non-native species are not currently known to be 'invasive', but once established some, such as signal crayfish, can cause problems for recreational users and others who rely on our rivers and lochs for their livelihoods.

Signal crayfish can have a significant adverse impact on our native freshwater plants and animals in any river, loch or pond they inhabit. In running waters extensive burrows can destabilise banks, causing erosion, and bank collapse. They also prey on young fish and their eggs, and compete for food and habitat which further impacts on the populations of native fish.

### Signal crayfish are already causing a significant problem in some areas of Scotland, so why are trapping licences not permitted to reduce their numbers?

Trapping trials have concluded that although numbers may be reduced during the short-term, traps may favour the capture of larger individuals. An unintended consequence of selective harvesting is the increased growth and earlier maturation of juvenile crayfish, which can cause the population to increase. It is not, therefore a sustainable long-term solution.

It is illegal to trap for signal crayfish for personal consumption or for onward sale, due to the significant and unacceptable risk of introduction to other waters, which are presently unaffected by crayfish. **Any trapping for scientific purposes, or to limit numbers, requires a licence.**

### What is being done to find a solution to the signal crayfish problem and to protect the rivers and lochs of Scotland?

SEPA is the lead organisation for non-native species issues in freshwaters in Scotland. SEPA ([www.sepa.org.uk](http://www.sepa.org.uk)) oversees efforts to prevent signal crayfish from becoming established across all the waters of Scotland, working closely with partners such as Scottish Natural Heritage ([www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk)), Police Scotland and the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland, (RAFTS).



## Unfortunately no long-term solution has yet been found to eradicate signal crayfish once they are established.

Research continues to try to find suitable control techniques and to prevent the movement of signal crayfish within rivers and between catchments. In some situations where the crayfish are in small enclosed ponds eradication by poisoning has been possible, but in larger lochs such techniques are unsuitable.

To stop migration of crayfish from one river headwater in South Lanarkshire, into another nearby watershed in Dumfries and Galloway, a large barrier was constructed recently, but it will not be known for some time how successful this has been at stopping the crayfish. Many water users, businesses and associated organisations across the region and further afield are hugely concerned that other water bodies could also become infested with signal crayfish.

## Until a long-term solution can be found the only way of protecting unaffected water bodies is to prevent the movement of any crayfish or their eggs, which could find their way to new locations....

This includes:

- Encouraging good bio-security practice by everyone who uses or works in or around water (including fishermen, boaters and contractors), to prevent the transfer of animals or eggs between waters, by promoting the 'Check Clean Dry' message. This advice relates to preventing the spread of all non-native species but in and out of water.
- Working to prevent the illegal trapping and movement of signal crayfish, to reduce the risk of transfer to other waters (intentionally or unintentionally).
- Supporting research into sustainable techniques to control or prevent movement of crayfish within rivers and between catchments.

### What can I do to help?

**Please help to prevent the spread** of **ALL** invasive non-native species by **Checking, Cleaning and Drying** all equipment that is used in water, before using it elsewhere (particularly in other river catchments), and raise awareness with others. For more information on the Check Clean Dry campaign, visit [www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry). This advice relates to both recreational and commercial activities in or near water.



**If you see a signal crayfish:** please take the time to inform the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) by contacting **Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services (SEARS) 24/7 Customer Service Helpline on 08452 302050**, or email [info@sears.scotland.gsi.uk](mailto:info@sears.scotland.gsi.uk). Tell us where (a grid reference if possible), when and how many. Take a photograph if you can, showing its size. All this will help to confirm identification and age.

### **If you come across a crayfish trap:**

Please do not handle it or remove it from the water. Please report it to **Police Scotland** by telephoning: **'101'** or call **Crimestoppers** on: **0800 555 111**.



**If you take one from the water** (accidentally or otherwise): **Do not take it away**, as female crayfish may be carrying eggs which could be spread to other waters.

To humanely dispose of a signal crayfish, SSPCA accepted guidance advises to crush crayfish with a single blow from a heavy or hard object, followed by burying the remains close to where it was found.

### **Can signal crayfish live out of fresh water?**

Signal crayfish do not often come out of the water but they can migrate short distances over land, usually on a wet night when they won't dry out too quickly and they're less vulnerable to predators.

It's very unlikely that they would choose to be out of the water during the day. Signal crayfish can survive out of water for a number of days, particularly if they are in moist conditions. They can also survive in salt water for a short time.

### **Aren't crayfish useful for coarse fishing? (e.g. bait/fattening fish etc.)**

In the short term, juvenile signal crayfish may provide food for some fish species. However, they breed rapidly and can soon prey on fish eggs, fry and small fish. They can also have a significant impact on the habitats used by fish. For these reasons, the introduction of signal crayfish cannot be seen as being of benefit to an existing fishery, and in fact, their presence can lead to significant, and irreversible, damage.

### **Want to know more?**

For further information about signal crayfish, other non-native species and good biosecurity measures, please visit:

[www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)  
[www.sepa.org.uk](http://www.sepa.org.uk)  
[www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk)



### **What does the law say?**

**The law is clear.**

**Because signal crayfish are so destructive to native freshwater life,  
it is illegal to:**

- Be in possession of a live crayfish or have them under your control without a license.
- Release, or allow to escape from captivity, any animal to a place out-with its native range. (This includes returning to the wild any signal crayfish that you may have accidentally caught)\*.
- Set a crayfish trap in Scotland without a license.



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