



**Bristol Zoological  
Society**  
Saving Wildlife Together



## **Endangered UK crayfish released into the wild by Bristol Zoo conservationists**

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Conservationists from Bristol Zoological Society have released a healthy population of native crayfish into the wild to help bolster dwindling numbers in UK waterways.

They are under threat of extinction due to the spread of invasive North American signal crayfish, which compete for food and habitat and carry crayfish plague - a disease which is deadly to white-clawed crayfish. This disease can be easily spread by people on damp wellies, walking boots, fishing tackle and nets.

As a result, there has been a 70 % decline in numbers of the UK's only native crayfish species in south west England. This species is at risk of becoming extinct from Great Britain in the next 20 years.

A team of native wildlife experts from Bristol Zoo have collaborated with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on the project, which aims to turnaround the plight of the UK's endangered native white-clawed crayfish. The crayfish release project is funded partly by RAPID LIFE, an EU-funded LIFE project aimed at identifying and managing aquatic invasive species in order to protect our native plants and animals and their habitats across England.

Adult crayfish were released into the River Itchen in Hampshire after being reared from eggs at Bristol Zoo for between three and five years to ensure they had a good chance of survival when introduced into their new home.

Jen Nightingale, Bristol Zoo's UK conservation manager and RAPID LIFE partner said; "We have worked so hard at the Zoo to successfully breed this endangered species, and we are thrilled to see them return to their natural habitat."

As well as releasing captive-born crayfish into the river, conservationists caught 'berried' (egg-carrying) female crayfish to bring back to the Zoo, as Jen explains: "The plight of juvenile crayfish in the wild is fraught with danger and only around five per cent survive. So, as well as supplementing wild populations, we bring berried females into the safety of the Zoo to rear their young. At the Zoo we can offer safe, stable conditions and we have a 90 per cent success rate with hatching and rearing crayfish from eggs."

To help stop the spread of invasive plants and animals, from one water body to another, conservationists are urging the public to ensure they [check, clean and dry](#) all equipment, shoes and clothing that have been used in or around waterways.