



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Crawfish *Palinurus elephas*
Crown Dependency: Sark, Channel Islands**

Related to the Lobster, the Crawfish, also known as the European Spiny Lobster, is recognisable because it has no claws but instead, spikey multi-purpose front legs. It can grow to 50cm in length and weigh several kilograms.

This was once a commercially fished species in the Channel Islands but was so over-fished in the 1960s and 1970s that it became commercially extinct. In the last few years, it has begun to make a come-back, not only in Sark but around parts of the British Isles but, so far, the Channel Island of Sark is the only place to protect crawfish completely so that they are not once more wiped out.

In 2018, the island's Sea Fisheries authority consulted with local fishermen after a survey was carried out by Sark-based underwater film-maker Sue Daly. The survey showed Crawfish are making a return. She noted that, since starting to dive around the Channel Islands in 1988, she had seen hardly any crawfish, one or two adults per year and some years none.

However, in 2014, she began seeing juvenile Crawfish on the reefs around Sark for the first time. Since then, she saw more and larger Crawfish but was concerned that, without protection, these creatures would simply be fished out again.

The return of Crawfish has been reported also around the other Channel Islands and the south-west coast of England and has been recorded by the Marine Conservation Society.

After discussions with local fishermen, the Sark's Sea Fisheries Committee proposed to protect Crawfish within the island's three-mile (approximately 5 km) territorial limit. The proposal was supported by the island's government, Chief Pleas, in January 2018 and the amendment to Sark's fishing law was enacted that spring.

Committee chairman Helen Plummer said that the hope is that Crawfish stocks will continue to increase and perhaps, in time, it might be possible to allow a limited amount of fishing for them.



Crawfish at Sark. © Sue Daly.

However, they are fully protected for at least the next three years. Sark conservationists note that Sark is a small place, so we can get some things done quickly, but would welcome the other Channel Islands and the UK also protecting this species before it is too late. Crawfish are native to the south and west coasts of the British Isles, south to the Azores, the western Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean Seas. (They should not be confused with Crayfish, which are freshwater crustaceans.)

In congratulating Sark and its fishermen for their foresight and lead, the Marine Conservation Society and UKOTCF note the potential of the marine (and, indeed, terrestrial) environment to recover if given the chance, by methods including species protection, protected areas and others.

A film by Sue Daly about the return of the Crawfish can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/234074069>.