The Adder

A misunderstood treasure of the countryside

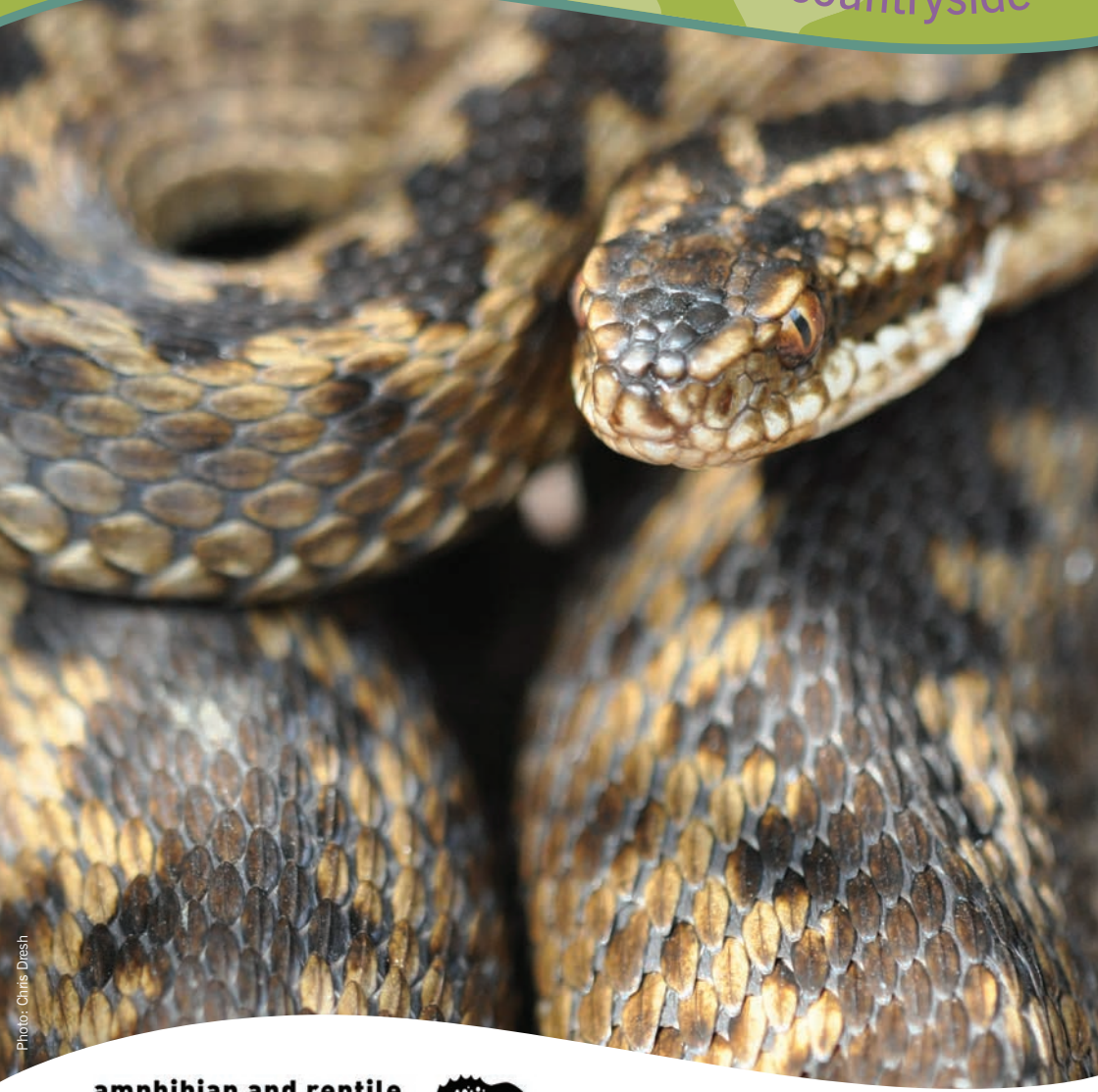

Photo: Chris Dresh

amphibian and reptile conservation

The Facts

1. Adders are venomous, but they are not aggressive and most bites result from deliberate handling, antagonisation or accidental encounters.
2. An adder's first line of defence is to disappear into nearby vegetation rather than bite something much larger than itself.
3. The risk of being bitten is minimal if adders are treated with respect and observed from a distance.
4. Human deaths are extremely rare, much rarer than deaths as a result of wasp or bee stings.
5. You are far more likely to get bitten by a dog than an adder.
6. There have been no reported fatalities due to adder bites in Britain since 1975.

LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH!

Male adder

Photo: ARC Trust

Identification

The adder is easily recognised by the '**zig-zag**' stripe along its back.

They can grow to around 60cm in length and have a rather stocky appearance.

Males' 'zig-zags' are black, females' are brown.

On occasion, completely black specimens are seen.

ADDERS GIVE BIRTH TO LIVE YOUNG!

Photo: Mark Barber

Female adder

Photo: Mark Barber

Black 'melanistic' adder

What else could it be?

Slow-worm

They look like snakes, but are actually legless lizards. Commonly found under objects in gardens.

Photo: Fred Holmes

Grass snake

Also common in gardens, often associated with ponds. Olive green or brown in colour, with a distinctive yellow and black collar.

Photo: ARC Trust

Smooth snake

Britain's rarest snake with a limited distribution, only found on the southern English heaths.

Photo: ARC Trust

Where do adders live?

They are generally found in **open 'wild' habitats** such as **heathlands, commons, moorland, sea cliffs, dunes** and **woodland rides.**

It is very rare to find them in gardens, except when they are adjacent to the above mentioned habitats.

Photo: Chris Gleed-Owen

Heathland

Photo: Chris Gleed-Owen

Dunes

When will I encounter adders?

Spring and **summer** are the main periods when adders are active. They hibernate from October to mid February.

Adders are generally seen basking in the sun, but as long as it is above 10ºC and not heavily raining they can be encountered in most weather conditions.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN HABITATS LIKE THESE, CONSIDER WEARING TROUSERS AND STOUT BOOTS!

Protection under the law

All British reptiles (including the adder) are protected by law. It is illegal to injure, kill or sell them (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).

The adder is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and is thus recognised as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006).

MALE ADDERS DANCE TO COMPETE FOR FEMALES!

Photo: Mark Barber

Conservation

All amphibian and reptile species are declining and under threat.

One of the biggest issues is fragmentation and loss of habitat.

The adder is considered one of the most vulnerable widespread species, as it is not very mobile and populations can become isolated.

LET US KNOW!

Have you seen an adder?

To help conserve adders it is important to understand their distribution.

Go to **www.welshdragons.org to submit a sighting.**

If you are interested in getting involved in conserving your native 'herpetofauna' please contact your local Amphibian and Reptile Group – **www.arguk.org**

ADDERS FEED MAINLY ON LIZARDS AND SMALL MAMMALS, SUCH AS VOLES!

If you think that you may have been bitten by an adder:

DO NOT:

✗ Tie a tourniquet.

✗ Try to cut or suck the venom out of the bite.

DO:

✓ Stay calm and do as little walking as possible.

✓ Immediately arrange transport to the nearest hospital.

Around 70% of adder bites result in no symptoms or local pain, swelling and inflammation, which are easily treated. Most people recover quickly. However, all suspected bites must be treated as medically serious since reactions vary. Occasionally, bites can be life-threatening or cause problems for several months.

ADDERS CAN LIVE FOR OVER 20 YEARS!

Domesticated animals and adders

Pets and livestock are occasionally bitten by adders.

Most reported bites are in dogs. An unfortunate event with neither animal to blame, this generally happens when a dog investigates an adder, and the snake feels threatened.

Although the bites are painful they are rarely fatal and most dogs make a full recovery.

If you are in good adder habitat it is advisable to keep your dog under control for its own safety. This will also prevent disturbance to ground nesting birds such as the nightjar.

If your animal is bitten by an adder (or you suspect that it may have been) you should seek prompt veterinary attention.

Photo: Tony Phelps

About Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is a national wildlife charity (Registered Charity 1130188) committed to conserving amphibians and reptiles and saving the disappearing habitats on which they depend.

655A Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 4AP
t: 01202 391319 e: enquiries@arc-trust.org www.arc-trust.org

Booklet edited by Mark Barber

Booklet designed by The Design Unit www.thedesignunit.com

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Natural Resources Wales