

The Adder

A treasure of the Kent countryside

Photo: Jason Steel



KRAG

amphibian and reptile
conservation



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.

TAKE A LOOK.
ADDERS
ARE EASY TO
RECOGNISE!



Photo: Mark Barber

Female adder



Photo: Mark Barber

Black 'melanistic' adder

Britain has a third snake species, the smooth snake. This is only found on the heaths of Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey.

What have I seen?

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

Adder



Rarely found in gardens and slower moving than grasssnakes, adders are easily recognised by the zig-zag pattern on their back.

Photo: Jason Steel

The Adder – A treasure of the Kent countryside

The Facts

- 1** In Kent the adder can be found on downland, heaths and coastal margins. A remarkable snake and the only one living within the Arctic Circle.
- 2** Adders hibernate to avoid cold weather in autumn and usually reappear in early spring but may emerge earlier if the weather is warm enough.
- 3** Female adders give birth to live young and bask in sunshine to help the babies develop quickly.
- 4** Females have a tough life and only breed every other year as they don't feed whilst gravid (pregnant).
- 5** This only leaves them about six weeks of feeding before entering hibernation.
- 6** Adders are only mildly venomous and are not aggressive unless handled or threatened.

LOOK BUT
DON'T TOUCH!



Photo: Jason Steel

Where do adders live?

In Kent they are generally found in **open 'wild' habitats** such as **chalk and coastal grassland**, **sea cliffs** and **woodland rides**.

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



Photo: Mike Phillips

Downland



Photo: Mike Phillips

Open woodland



Photo: Jason Steel

Coastal grassland

**IF YOU ARE
LOOKING FOR
ADDERS THEN IT'S
WISE TO WEAR
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!



Male adder

Photo: Jason Steel

LET US KNOW!

Have you seen an adder?

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

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

If you are interested in getting involved in conserving your native 'herpetofauna' why not join the Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group. This can be done from the website at www.kentarg.org/members/join-krag

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.

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

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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 only local pain, swelling and inflammation. 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 Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group

Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group (KRAG) promotes and works to conserve, protect and increase the understanding of herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) in Kent, South-East England. KRAG would like to thank ARC Conservation for allowing KRAG to adapt their original leaflet.

c/o Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre, Brogdale Farm Office,
Brogdale Rd, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8XZ
e: info@kentarg.org
www.kentarg.org

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