

All About Adders

IDENTIFICATION

Adders are relatively small, stocky snakes growing to approximately 65 cm in length. Males are usually grey with black zig-zag patterns down their body whereas females are brown, with a dark brown zig-zag pattern instead. Black (melanistic) colouration can also occur.



Jamie Hall



Jon Hawkins: Surrey Hills Photography

Adders also have very distinctively red eyes.

The UK is home to three species of snakes; the adder, the grass snake and the smooth snake (remember, although slow worms may look like snakes, they're actually lizards!).

The adder (*Vipera berus*) is the only venomous snake found in Britain, but don't worry, adders are very shy and although their bite is painful they are almost never fatal.

If you are lucky enough, you may spot an adder basking in the sun in a woodland glade or heathland. As reptiles, adders are cold blooded, meaning they need the sun's warm rays to help them get started for the day. They can be found across mainland Britain and prefer drier habitats such as grasslands, woodlands, coastal areas, heathland and moorland. The snakes hibernate from October to February/March, when they emerge in the warming spring.

These predators hunt a wide variety of species from lizards to small mammals as well as ground nesting birds.

In Herefordshire, the population of adders is very small and their distribution is patchy.

If you do see one, please do take a photo if possible and record the sighting at:

<https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/>



David Chamberlain

Did you know?

Even though they are reptiles, adders actually give birth to live young?! Adders mate in the early spring once temperatures reach 13-15 degrees Celsius, where the female will carry the young for 4-5 months before giving birth to the neolates (the name given to newborn snakes) in late summer. Snake species that incubate their eggs internally, 'giving birth' to live young instead of laying eggs are known as viviparous.

How to protect adders

Adders are one of the many species that are now endangered in the UK. This is largely due to a loss in hibernation sites, from habitat destruction and disturbance. They are an important component of the food chain and need our help.

Leaving sections of your garden to grow wild will provide areas for hunting and hibernation. This will allow adders, and other snakes, to pass through your garden as part of their movement along wildlife corridors. Log piles or rockeries left in a sunny spot close to dense vegetation will provide shelter and a food source for snakes.

Leaving out a wooden board or roofing felt will help you discover if you have snakes and other reptiles in your garden as they will be used for basking or hiding underneath.

Nature reserves, such as those maintained by the Wildlife Trusts, are one of the few places where the adders habitat is protected. It is vital that these reserves are kept as a safe haven for these creatures, as well as the improvement and development of wildlife corridors so they can disperse from one reserve to the next.

What to do if you find an adder

Adders are shy creatures, and if you find one, the best thing to do is nothing. If disturbed, the snake will simply move on.

If you find one on the move in your garden, bring in any pets and children in case they accidentally disturb the adder and make it feel threatened.

If you are walking in an area where adders are known to live, then you can protect yourself by wearing sturdy shoes and keeping dogs on leads whilst sticking to footpaths. Don't forget to keep an eye on the edge of the path for snakes basking in the sun!

Adders are a protected species and protected under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is therefore illegal to injure, kill or sell this species, and due to their venomous nature, it is strongly advised you avoid handling or touching them.

If treated with respect and given a wide berth,

Help! I've been bitten!

Snake bites occur extremely rarely (and mostly are to dogs, not people) but, if you are bitten by a snake, (even if it wasn't an adder) you should seek medical attention as soon as possible. Try to get a good idea of what the snake looked like.

In an area where it is known snakes are present you should keep dogs on leads.



Niall Benvie/2020VISION

Our vision is for a Herefordshire richer and more diverse in wildlife that is valued, and cared for, by its people to the benefit of all.

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust is a driving force for nature conservation in the county with over 5,000 members from across Herefordshire and beyond.

We're part of a national network of Wildlife Trusts. We campaign to protect wildlife and habitats both locally and nationally.

Together with our members and volunteers we work tirelessly to protect wildlife across Herefordshire, both on our 55 nature reserves and in partnership with other landowners.

 **55 nature reserves**

 **5,000 mem-**



300 active volunteers

 **534 hectares of land for wildlife**

Herefordshire Wildlife Trust



Get Involved!

Join Today! Becoming a member is a great way to help your local wildlife.

Volunteer: we are always looking for people to join our work parties carrying out practical management on our reserves - but we have other opportunities in our offices and at events too.

Contact us:
enquiries@herefordshirewt.co.uk
01432 356872

www.herefordshirewt.org