

# Adder *Vipera berus*



Adders *Vipera berus* are 50-70 cms long, with a distinctive zig-zag pattern along the back. Males have a black zig-zag with pale white or grey body colouration. Females are a broader, larger snake with a dark brown zig-zag with brown body colouration.

Adders occur in lowland heath, acid grassland with rough scrub mosaics, moorland and larger forestry plantations, and are strongly associated with gorse, bramble and bracken stands with a build of bracken litter. They also use young commercial forestry plantations of larch and conifer.

Adders are often found on sites with viviparous lizard *Zootoca vivipara* present which are a major prey species of juvenile adders. Sites suitable for adders are often important for other reptiles, butterflies, invertebrates and dormice.

Nationally, adders are experiencing the most recent dramatic decline of UK reptile species (*Adder Conference Greenwich University 2011*), especially within central England and parts of southern England.

Previous Herefordshire surveys for the 'What's That Snake?' Project (*HWT 2010*) and the Community Commons Project (*HWT 2006-2010*) revealed both the adder and viviparous lizard are the most localised reptile species within the county. Adder distribution is mainly restricted to the county boundary areas with Shropshire, Wales and Worcestershire. They are now strongly associated with lowland heath, a rare habitat within the county such as at Ewyas Harold and the Malverns.

### Threats

- Habitat loss
- Reduction, fragmentation and isolation of habitats
- Mismanagement, excessive tidying and loss of habitat structures and the resulting decline of basking and hibernaculum locations
- Succession of habitats
- Excessive grazing
- Increase in predators, mainly avian such as pheasants
- Persecution
- Excessive disturbance

### Current Action

- Focused management is ongoing on the Malvern Hills (MHC, MH AONB), in Community Commons Sites with HLS agreements and on 2 National Trust reserves (NT)

	Objective	Action
A	Locate and map existing populations to create an adder atlas (HBRC) (NH) (HART)	1
B	Produce focused long- term management plans for key populations	3
C	Increase the extent of habitat suitable for adders and aim to link populations where possible	4
D	Review the need for potential reintroductions and bolstering of populations	3
E	Monitor the outcomes of grazing schemes	1,2,4
F	Encourage greater all-round interest and focus on adders and reptiles by all appropriate conservation bodies and site managers, with dedicated training programs for partners	2,3,4

	Actions	Target
1	Gain funding for a major survey programme looking at historical and current sites (HWT, HART)	2017
2	Plan and deliver training and education for site managers and conservation bodies (HART, FC, NT, WT, Private landowners)	Annual
3	Produce and publicise management guidance and long- term management plans (NH, HART)	2020
4	Provide advice and encourage private landowners to undertake surveys and manage sites sympathetically (AES, NH)	Annual

Lead Partner	Nigel Hand, HART
Key Partners	NT, MHC, FC, HWT, WT, HBRC, WVAONB, FE