

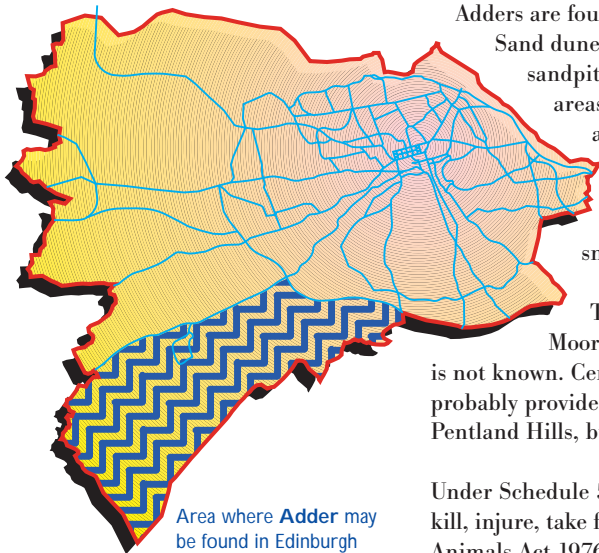


Adder

(Vipera berus)

STATUS & ECOLOGY

The adder is one of three snakes native to the British Isles. It is distinguished by a distinctive broad zigzag band that extends along the full length of the back. On the back of the head there is a marking which usually resembles an inverted letter V, although this can be highly variable and may also form an X, M or H. Generally the females are duller and browner than the males and the contrast between markings and background colouring less distinct. The adder is a rather squat snake, the female is less than 76cm long, while the male is usually less than 60cm long.



Adders are found in open areas such as heaths, moors and scrub-covered hillsides. Sand dunes, open woodlands, uncultivated fields, disused railway cuttings and sandpits are also favoured. However, adders will move away from these areas if disturbance is great. Scotland represents an important upland area for the adder as its favoured habitats are both extensive and generally remote and undisturbed. Although Scottish adder populations compare favourably with the rest of the UK, a recent report by Scottish Natural Heritage indicates that although the snake is widespread, its population is declining overall.

The adder has been recorded in southern Scotland, including the Moorfoot Hills and the Lammermuir Hills. However, its status in Edinburgh is not known. Certainly, the part of the Pentland Hills which lies within Edinburgh probably provides suitable adder habitat. Historically adders could be found in the Pentland Hills, but there have been no recorded sightings in recent years.

Under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 it is illegal to deliberately kill, injure, take from the wild or trade adders. The provisions of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 also prohibit the possession of adders without a licence from an appropriate local authority.

“By and large, adders are in more danger from people than people are from adders”

David Stephen

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Adders have suffered from a range of human activities. The loss of habitat to new commercial and residential development has greatly reduced suitable breeding, basking and hunting locations. Road development has exacerbated this problem by severing adder ranges and reducing breeding opportunities. Intensive farming, particularly the liberal use of insecticides and herbicides, has also reduced the amount of available habitat and food sources. At the local scale persecution of snakes has always had an impact, particularly near to urban centres.

Threats

Often because the presence of adders goes unrecorded, development related impacts continue to threaten adder populations. Increased countryside access also threatens to further disturb these sensitive snakes, particularly small, isolated populations close to urban centres.

CURRENT ACTION

An investigation was undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage in 1993 to establish the range and concentrations of adder populations across Scotland. However, no specific studies have been undertaken in Edinburgh.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objectives

To determine the status of adder in Edinburgh and conserve and enhance any local populations identified.

Targets

To determine the status of adder in Edinburgh and encourage sympathetic management in areas where local populations are identified.

Actions

Investigate historical records, by Winter 2000, to identify Edinburgh sites previously occupied by adder.

(Actioned by : Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Liase with landowners, land managers and other potential sources of information, by Summer 2000, to determine any local adder sightings.

(Actioned by : Pentland Hills Regional Park)

Undertake a field survey across likely adder habitat in the Pentland Hills, by Autumn 2000.

(Actioned by : Pentland Hills Regional Park & Scottish Wildlife Trust)

If adders are found in the Pentland Hills, draw up an appropriate management strategy by Spring 2001. If adders are absent, establish reasons for this, by Spring 2001, and consider the feasibility for their re-introduction.

(Actioned by : Pentland Hills Regional Park, Froglife & Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Key Contacts

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