

ADDER

(*Vipera berus*)



Identification:

- Adults 60-80 cm in length.
- Stocky body.
- Males generally grey with black markings.
- Females generally light brown with dark brown markings.
- Very young individuals reddish-brown or ginger but zigzag pattern still visible.
- Completely black (melanistic) Adders are quite common in some areas.
- Zigzag pattern down centre of the back and a 'V' or 'X' shaped marking on the head.
- Reddish iris with vertical pupil.



Distribution:

- Native to the UK.
- Found throughout the UK but absent from Ireland.
- Widespread throughout Europe and across Russia. Range extends north into the Arctic Circle.

Ecology:

- UK's only venomous snake. Bites are painful but rarely dangerous.
- Found in open habitats with plenty of sunlight such as heathland, moorland, open woodland and sea cliffs. Rarely stray into gardens.



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- Active during the day hunting for small mammals, amphibians, insects and birds.
- Actively hunts prey in warm weather. Uses a 'sit and wait' technique when it's cold.
- Kills prey with venomous bite and swallows them whole.



Lifecycle:

- Emerge from hibernation in March. Males emerge before females.
- In April males begin searching for mates. Males fight to secure a female.
- In late August/early September females 'give birth' to 3-20 live offspring.
- Hibernate from October to March. Often use the same hibernation site for life.



Predators and other threats:

- Populations in the UK are declining.
- Threatened by human persecution and loss of habitat.
- Predators include birds of prey but also pheasants, crows, etc.



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