

Make the Adder Count 2006

A Springtime Adder Survey



THE HERPETOLOGICAL
CONSERVATION TRUST

Can you help monitoring adders?

Make the Adder Count is a survey co-ordinated by The Herpetological Conservation Trust. Following a successful pilot project in 2005, we plan to turn it into a long-term national surveillance programme, collating data from many sites, to monitor trends in adder populations.

The adder is a reptile of particular conservation concern to many people. Although it is Britain's most widespread snake, there is a strong body of collective information pointing towards long-term national decline. *Make the Adder Count* aims to:

- Provide quantitative data to monitor trends in population status.
- Strengthen the case for better protection and guide proactive conservation.
- Provide a yardstick against which to measure the effectiveness of any future conservation effort.
- Create a focus for local survey and conservation work.
- Raise awareness of adder conservation issues.

How you can help

We want to gain a measure of national population status by counting adders after their springtime emergence from winter hibernacula. At this time of year (February to May, depending on weather and geographical location) adders are at their most visible, lying out, sometimes in aggregations.

If you or your colleagues regularly visit an adder hibernation/aggregation site, or know of a site where you could arrange visits, then a simple count of snakes could help us to help the adder.

If you already have data on the numbers of adders you have seen at a particular site (or sites) over past years, we would also be interested to hear from you.

What sort of experience you need

Gathering data for this project does require a good working knowledge of at least one local adder population, familiarity with adder activity patterns and experience of observing these snakes. If you do not have the necessary experience, but want to get involved in either *Make the Adder Count* or other reptile (or amphibian) survey work, then we recommend that you contact your nearest amphibian and reptile group. These groups are local sources of reptile expertise and may be able to provide the necessary training or organise counts. Contact information is available from the project co-ordinator (details below).

How to take part

To take part in the project, or to obtain further information, please contact the project co-ordinator, John Baker:

Phone: 01986 872016

Mobile: 07884 441521

Email: addercount@herpconstrust.org.uk

***Make the Adder Count* is part of the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS) project, an initiative being developed by a partnership of organisations, led by The Herpetological Conservation Trust. NARRS is currently at a development stage. If you wish to take part in the consultation process, please contact The HCT via the adder count contact above.**

Make the Adder Count 2006 Notes



Thank you for your interest in *Make the Adder Count*. Please find a recording form enclosed and explanatory notes below.

About *Make the Adder Count*

This survey aims to encourage springtime counts of adders, with the objective of gathering a long-term surveillance dataset. A number of people, possibly including you, regularly visit adder sites, especially during the spring, when adders are lying out and are readily visible. *Make the Adder Count* wants to encourage experienced observers to gather data in a standardised way (by making at least three and, ideally, five or six, counts of snakes) so that information may be pooled to build a picture of trends in adder populations nationally.

A successful pilot project run in 2005 suggested that counts from about 100 sites would allow the detection of changes in population with a reasonable degree of statistical certainty. With the count running again in 2006, this is the second year of what we hope will become a long-term programme.

When to make the count

The adder counts should be carried out during the springtime lying out period and especially within the optimum time window spanning March and April. Most of the peak counts in 2005 were made during this latter time frame.

Lying out period (national)	February-May
Optimum time for counts	March-April

The exact date when local adder numbers are at their peak will depend on weather and geographical location. Adders are likely to be active earlier in the south and west, than they are further north and east. The lying out period and optimum time for counts, locally, will fall somewhere within the range given in the box above. Optimal conditions will normally be in sunny weather, but timing site visits will rely on your judgement, based on local field experience. The counts will be used as an index of population size and should be made when you feel that the greatest number of adders is likely to be visible. Hence, this project demands a good deal of field experience from participants.

Contacts

If you do not have experience of adder or reptile surveys, but would like to become involved, then local groups of the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK network may be a good point of contact with regard to participating in herpetofaunal field work. Contact details of local groups are available at www.arg-uk.org.uk.

For further information, or additional survey forms, please contact the project coordinator: John Baker, phone: 01986 872016, mobile: 07884 441521, email: addercount@herpconstrust.org.uk

Filling in the Recording Form

Data protection and copyright agreement

As with all wildlife recording/monitoring programmes, the success of the project hinges on sharing data. We need to hold some personal data (your name and contact details) but it will be used only for the purposes of the project. However, data may potentially be relayed to other conservation projects or recording schemes, should there be a conservation benefit of doing this.

Signing the data protection and copyright agreement confirms that you are willing to allow us to keep your personal data. It also indicates that you are willing to let us pass on the data you provide to others, for conservation benefit. This might include passing on site records to biological records centres or other recording schemes.

Site confidentiality To share information and provide general feedback, a summary of the data collected will be sent to all of the participating surveyors. The data summary may include a dot map to show the distribution of survey sites and summary statistics. The summary will *not* include exact site location information. However, this information will be relayed to survey participants (subject to informal screening) should they request such information for conservation purposes. If you feel that, for reasons of site security, you do not wish to reveal the location of your site to other surveyors, then please tick the *Confidential site* box. If you tick this box, your site may still appear on a low-resolution dot map, but exact location details will be kept confidential

Count site details

Adders usually spend the winter communally at sites referred to as hibernacula or hibernation sites. They emerge in the spring to bask, during a 'lying out' phase. Adders usually bask close to, or on the surface of, their winter quarters, over a period of days or weeks. They are relatively visible at these springtime aggregation sites - where counts can be made. These sites are sometimes readily identifiable features, such as an embankment, fallen tree root ball, or similar.

Site number If you know of several aggregations within a single, larger site, then please use separate recording forms for each, and give them sequential numbers on the recording form (e.g. 'Wildwood Forest 1', 'Wildwood Forest 2' etc.).

In most cases counts will correspond with single hibernation sites/aggregation areas. However, not all adders spend the winter communally. Some individuals may hibernate singly and sometimes no obvious communal hibernation/aggregation sites can be found. In cases where adders are dispersed rather than aggregated, then observations of newly emerged adders can still be contributed if the observer follows the same route, such as a regular walk, each time a count is made. Such a count should be indicated by ticking the relevant box. This is essential to enable us to monitor trends over time.

Count data

A count is the number of adult adders you see on a single site visit. Counts should be made when you think the **greatest numbers of adders will be visible**. Hence, this survey relies on your experience in selecting the best weather conditions and appropriate time, during the February to May window, with regard to finding adders basking after emergence from their winter quarters. It is important to try and count when most adders are visible, as we will need data to be comparable year on year for identifying trends.

We would like you and/or your colleagues to make **at least three and ideally five or six counts** (survey visits). If you make more survey visits, then please submit these additional counts as well.

It is important to note that:

- Counts should be made without disturbing the snakes (disturbance may alter their behaviour).
- There is no need to closely approach snakes or an aggregation site (binoculars may be helpful).

Information about the wider site

Previous work indicates that adder populations fare differently on sites of differing size, isolation/connectivity, habitat types, management regime, or conservation designation. So, information on the wider site, within which your count site is located, may be useful.

Factors affecting the population

This section allows you to note any factors that you think may be affecting (positively or negatively) the population of adders based at your count site. These factors may affect the population at any time of the year – not solely when the adders are at the count site. **This information can be useful, even if you cannot collect count data.**

Counts from previous years

If you have counts of adders from previous years, we would be interested in these, too. However, please note that these data will not be relayed to other surveyors. They will be used for this project only. Please report the single highest count for each year (*there is no need to do this if you have already provided this information in 2005*).

Health and Safety for You...

Adders are venomous snakes and should be treated with caution. Adder counts should be carried out only by experienced or adequately trained persons. **This survey does not involve either handling or closely approaching snakes.** Observations can be made from a distance and ideally without disturbing the adders. Binoculars may be useful. Making counts of adders, as described here, is a relatively safe activity. However, the following checklist of health and safety precautions must be adhered to in order to participate in the adder count:

- Work with a partner or use a lone-worker system (inform someone of your whereabouts and expected time back from the field and have a check-in arrangement).
- Do not approach adders closely.
- Do not disturb or attempt to handle adders.
- Be cautious approaching an aggregation site – individual adders may disperse onto your approach route.
- Do not walk on, or climb over, an aggregation/hibernation site.
- Wear protective footwear – wellington boots are ideal.
- Wear clothing appropriate for the outdoors.
- If you are working in an area where Lyme disease may occur, please take appropriate precautions.

...and the Wildlife

Snakes, especially adders, may be subject to (illegal) persecution or, perhaps, even collection for captivity. To minimise any risk to adder populations, do not unnecessarily reveal aggregation locations to the general public, or draw attention to them. Should someone ask what you are doing, it is best to give a general answer such as bird-watching (and that you have permissions where relevant).

Adders are sensitive to repeated disturbance – so keep this to a minimum during counts.

Beware of disturbance of nesting birds – liaise with site managers.

Make the Adder Count 2006 Recording Form



Data protection and copyright agreement

I understand that the information that I provide on this form, including my name and contact details, will be entered onto a computer database. Any intellectual property rights that may pertain to the data submitted on this form will be shared with The Herpetological Conservation Trust. I understand that the data will be used for the objectives of this survey and may be used for other reasons of conservation benefit (see *Notes* on separate sheet).

Signature _____ Date _____ Confidential site

Surveyor contact details

Surveyor _____ Address _____
(Print name) _____
Phone number _____
Email _____

Count site details

Site name Grid reference
Site number, if necessary (see *Notes*)
Indicate whether the adders were an aggregation or were dispersed (a site count)

Count data

Please provide **at least three counts** and **ideally five or six counts** of all adult adders seen at your site. Breaking down counts into males and females is helpful, but should be attempted only if you are sufficiently confident in being able to sex snakes visually, from a distance, without disturbing them.

Count no.	Date	No. of adders	Male	Female
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

*Each count is the number of adults seen on any **one** site visit.*

Please add any further counts (use additional sheet if necessary)

7				
8				
9				
10				

Do you have counts of adders made at this (or any other) site from previous years? Yes No
If 'yes' to this question, we would be grateful if you could contribute these counts overleaf.

Information about the wider site

This section refers to the area within which the count site is located.

Does the site have any conservation designation? (*Tick one or more*)

National nature reserve SSSI
Other nature reserve County wildlife site
National park No conservation designation

How big is the site? 0-5 ha Greater than 5 ha

Tick one box that best describes how the count site is connected to other adder sites/populations.

Completely isolated by many km
Isolated from nearby sites by sub-optimal habitat
Linked by corridors (e.g. along a river or railway line)
Part of a larger group of populations occupying more or less continuous habitat

