

Make the Adder Count 2009 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 objectives of informing local conservation projects/interests and 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. 2009 is the fifth 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.

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 geographic 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.

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 of 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 (www.arguk.org) may be a good point of contact with regard to participating in herpetofaunal field work.

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 they will be used only for the purposes of the project. However, wildlife 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
- 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 a sunny 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 to 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. This is important if trends are to be monitored over time. Such a count should be indicated by ticking the relevant box.

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 optimum weather conditions and appropriate times, during the February to May window, with regard to finding adders basking after emergence from their winter quarters.

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 is regarded as a threat to many populations).
- 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 about the wider area, within which your count site is located, is 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 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 may 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 provided this information earlier*).

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 (www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk)

...and the Wildlife

Snakes, especially adders, may be subject to (illegal) persecution or 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 please keep this to a minimum during counts.

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