



ANIMAL ANTICS

Adders *Vipera berus berus*

The Adder is a native animal of the UK and the only venomous reptile. It is a stocky snake of less than a metre long and is very shy of human presence. Adders are quite timid in nature and will not usually bite unless they feel threatened or cornered.

Every year local veterinary practices see cases of Adder bites to our canine friends. An adder bite *can* be fatal but, if quick and appropriate veterinary treatment is sought, your dog should make a full recovery.

Be aware - watch your dog at all times and carry a mobile telephone whilst out walking which contains your veterinary practice number.



The female adder has a brown zig-zag pattern



The male adder has a black zig-zag pattern

Adder Facts

Adders are active during the day and hunt small mammals, frogs and young birds. Female adders reproduce once every two years and give birth to 3-18 live young, unlike grass snakes, which lay eggs.

The individual appearance of adders is variable but they can usually be identified by the dark V or X shape on the back of the head. The most distinguishing feature of the Adder is the dark zig-zag pattern running along the animal's back. The adder has a red eye, and is the only native reptile with a vertically split pupil. Male adders tend to be a cream or light brown colour with a black ventral zig-zag marking. Females are usually brown with a dark brown zig-zag.

Adders are a protected species across the United Kingdom. They are protected from being taken from the wild, being killed and from being sold. They are not legally protected from disturbance.

Where are Adders Found?

Adders can be found in a variety of habitats including woodland areas, moors, heathland, meadows, coastal dunes, hedgerows, and the banks of streams, lakes and ponds. All these habitats must provide a good food source of small mammals, good cover to avoid predation and open sunlight spots for thermal regulation.

Why are Dogs at Risk?

Dogs are relatively frequent victims of adder bites due to their nature of exploring undergrowth and their general inquisitiveness. Adder bites often occur when a dog is out on a walk and exploring the areas where snakes are basking in the sun. This makes them likely to disturb the snakes, either accidentally or due to their investigative actions. Dogs are frequently bitten on the face and limbs but bites can occur on any part of the body. Most snake bites tend to occur between March and October when the snakes are more active due to the warm weather.

Adder Bite Symptoms

These tend to cause swelling and pain and will often be around the head and forelimbs. Call a vet immediately. You might not see the snake, but may hear your dog yelp. If you witness a bite (identified by two puncture wounds) or your dog suffers an acute painful swelling or collapses on a walk, keep the dog as calm as possible, carry the dog (if possible) to prevent the poison from circulating and seek prompt veterinary attention.

Safe and happy walking!

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