

HOW DID THE ADDER BECOME EXTINCT IN WARWICKSHIRE?

Jan Clemons
Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team
(WART)



THE WARWICKSHIRE ADDER HUNT



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- The adder then was acknowledged as rare in the Midlands and listed as a priority species on the current UK Biodiversity Action plan. WART's first step was to determine the current distribution and status in the region.

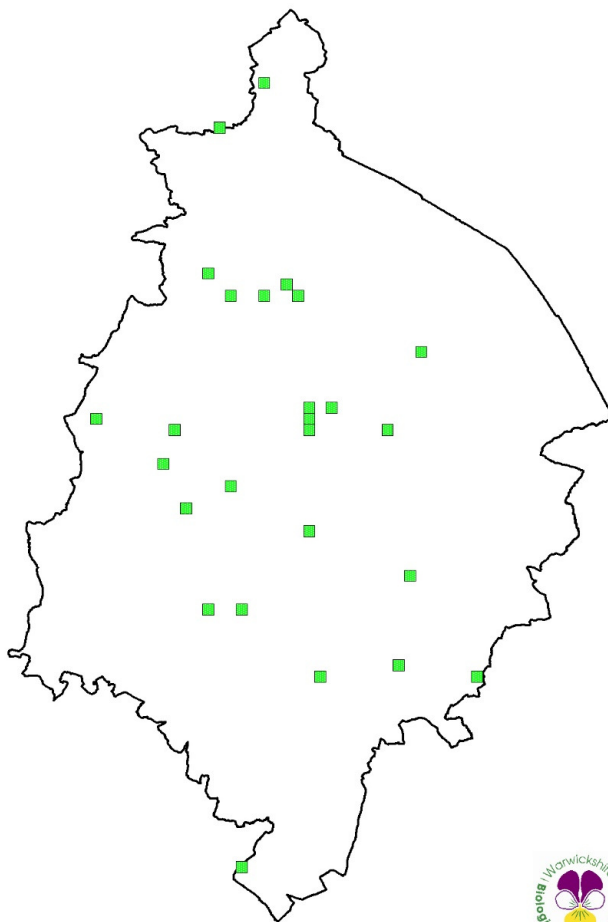
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- In 2004 WART became the lead partner for the adder in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- The adder is acknowledged as rare in the Midlands and is listed as a priority species on the UK Biodiversity Action plan. Our first step was to determine the current distribution and status in the region.
- There were 24 sites where adders had been recorded so our first step was to go back to these sites to have another look.

Adder records (historical)
Vipera berus
Warwickshire Distribution

■ Adder record 10km square





What did we find out?

- Half the sites had gone due to urban development and unsympathetic agricultural practices.
- On the remaining 12 sites we placed arrays of refugia (tins, onduline, roofing felt) which were checked yearly for 3 years. 6 of these sites turned up grass snakes.
- After 3 years we narrowed the search down to 5 sites which seemed to have habitats suitable for adders and had recent records from the 1990's

Kenilworth Common

- Best reptile assemblage site in the county. Grass snake, common lizard and slow worm present.
- Adders reportedly translocated from the New Forest in the 70's. Not clear if 'native' population was still extant.
- Reports in local press of adder bites in late 90's.
- Highly likely adders were present.

WART Reserve



Sutton Park – technically in the Warwickshire Vice County

- Ranger reported seeing an adder under a refugia in 1998.
- Subsequent surveys failed to find adders
- Grass snakes and common lizard present
- Heavy grazing by ponies
- Highly likely adders were present



- **MOD Kineton** – ex- county recorder 1996
- Convinced this was a misidentification after extensive survey work has only found grass snakes
- Habitat not right
- Unlikely adders were present
- Possible translocation site?



Packington Estate anecdotal evidence regarding persecution by gamekeepers in late 90's.

- Highly likely adders were present



Grendon Common

Best heathland habitat in the county. One adder record post 1990 submitted but yet to be validated.

- Grass snake, common lizard and slow worm present
- Possible translocation site?
- Unsure about past presence
- Atherstone 'Adders'?



Conclusions



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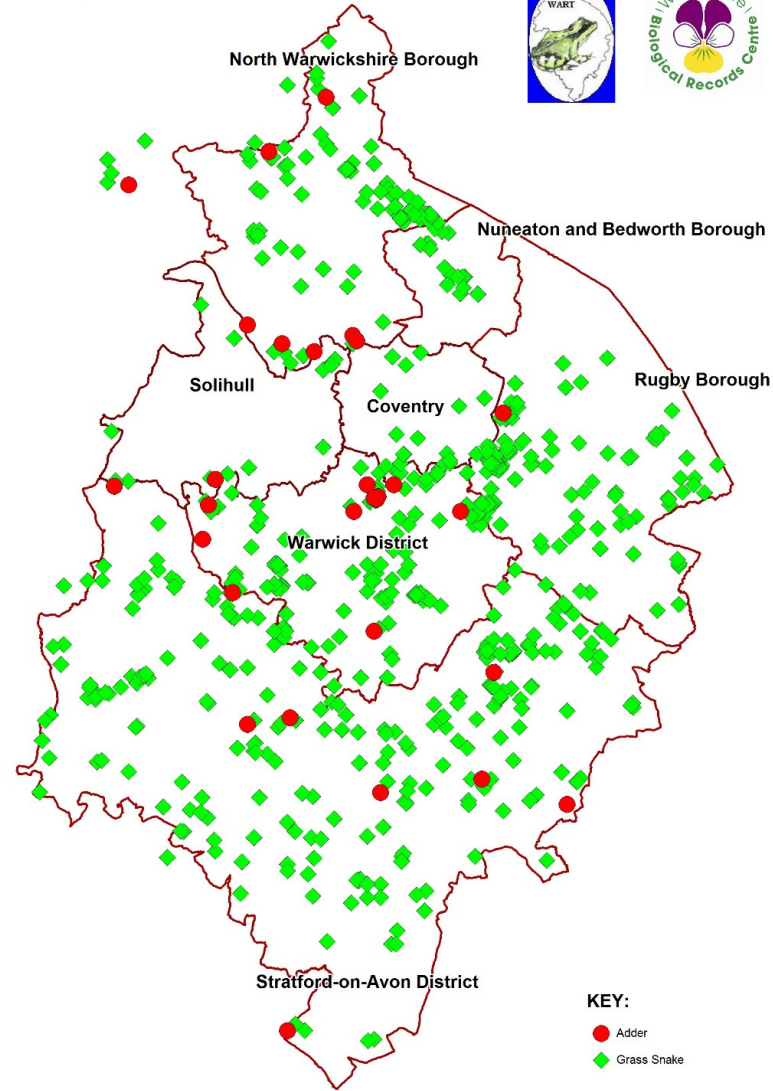
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- Unsympathetic habitat management and persecution by people
- Adders were once present in Warwickshire but due to habitat loss they were only in isolated colonies which are now extinct due to genetic isolation and subsequent inbreeding
- Misidentification both by the citizen scientist/naturalist and professional ecologist since biological recording started is more common than expected. This may have happened at several 'original' adder sites in the county

Distribution of Adder and Grass Snake Records



Implications



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- Other counties with small numbers of isolated adder sites could be in a similar situation and need to take action now before it's too late
- Should we therefore reintroduce adders to Warwickshire?
- We are now concentrating on common lizard and slow worm populations as these two species are not well recorded in the county either.

Extinction factors

- Isolation due to habitat loss & fragmentation



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- Compared to other UK reptiles, adders are slow breeding



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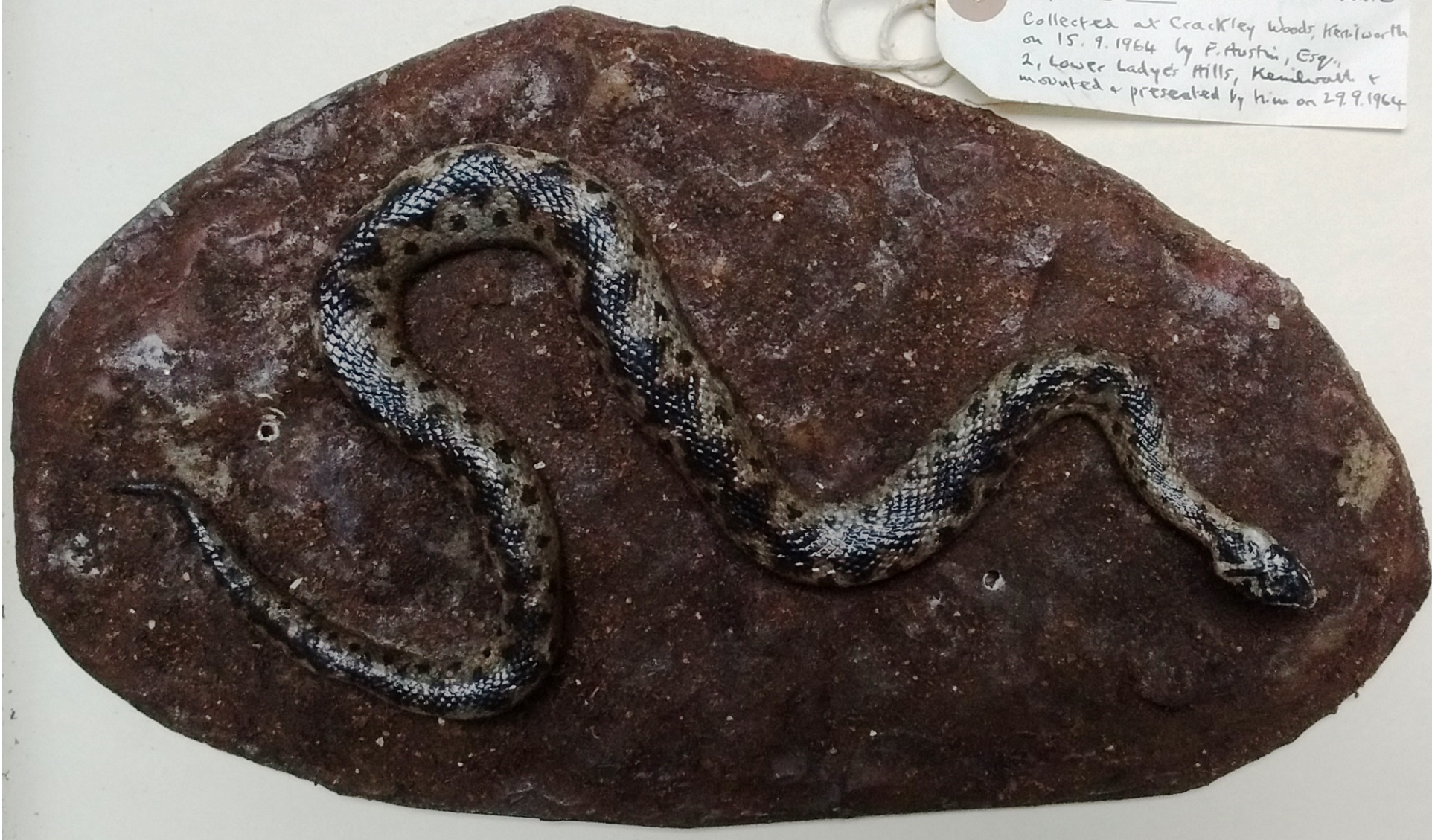
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- Compared to other UK reptiles, adders are slow breeding
- Grass snakes are commonly mistaken for adders

123/1964 C
COUNTY MUSEUM - WARWICK

ADDER or VIPER : NORTHERN ADDER

Vipera b. berus (L.) 1758 adult male

Collected at Crackley Woods, Kenilworth
on 15. 9. 1964 by P. Austin, Esq.,
2, Lower Ladyes Hills, Kenilworth &
mounted & presented by him on 29. 9. 1964



Danger!



**Adders live in these woods
Keep out!**

Thank you for your co-operation



With thanks to:

- All our reptile recorders past & present especially the present WART committee:
- Camille Newton, Tim Jenkins, Ian Tanner, Louise Sherwell, Natalie Walker, Agni Arampoglou, Karl Curtis, Howard Eccles, Becky Harvey, Derek Colley

