



Adders are Amazing! Gwiberod Gwych!

## 2. PRACTICAL ECOLOGY



### INTRODUCTION



When working with schools, it is worth checking with the current national curriculum for your country to see how you can tailor your talk or workshop to fit in with this. Schools are far more likely to make time for you to visit or host field trips if there are clear curriculum links. This sheet highlights things you could include. Adder engagement work can fit into so many areas of the curriculum, including: art, history, geography, drama, mathematics (adders!), English language – poetry, creative writing. However, the most obvious link is through ecology and science. Check out the ‘Adder poem’ activity sheet and all of our artistic activities for more ideas.

Our ‘Food chains and webs’ activity sheet also provides ideas for a simple ecological activity, which can be adapted to the age and Key Stage of your group. This sheet has some further tips on how to bring ecology into the classroom when talking about adders.

Visit the Adders are Amazing! section of the ARG UK website to download a free PowerPoint template which you can develop to use in classroom sessions. More tips are available in the ‘Resources’ section.

### TIPS!



- 1** Teaching practical ecology always works best outside! If you are limited to the school grounds, take the children outside to see if they can spot any nearby habitat which could support adders or reptiles. Discuss how good their school grounds could be for reptiles – why is the hard surfaced playground or short turf of the playing field not a great place to be if you are a reptile? It’s pretty exposed and predators will eat you quickly! What do they need? Shelter, food and water (a mate could also be discussed). Where in the school grounds could they find these? You could create an artificial ‘habitat’ using foam blocks, toys, sticks - whatever you can find and create a hibernation structure or basking spot – maybe a pretend pond too for ‘snake food’. You could scale it up for human sized snakes, and get the children (and their teachers) to try it out!
- 2** If you are able, take the children on a field trip to actual adder habitat. If doing this as part of your ARG’s activity, please complete a risk assessment – a generic one is available from ARG UK. It is always best to show children the actual place where adders live, to make it real and reassure them that they are not scary and lurking everywhere!



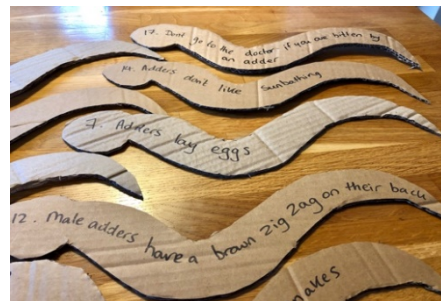


If working with a secondary school, ask the teachers to bring along metal quadrats. If these are not available, you can also use plastic hula hoops to sample the vegetation in the adder habitat. This is important, as although they are unlikely to see an actual adder (big groups = big disturbance = no snakes), you can focus on the ecology of the whole habitat. Find out what plants adders live near? What insects, mammals, birds also live here? How would you find and identify them? This really helps the group to see how adders fit into the natural environment. Children love throwing quadrats over their shoulders to randomly sample – but watch out for flying hula hoops.



### 3

Play the adder search quiz (see activity sheet), using cardboard adders and true/false questions on the back. This could be done on school grounds or on a field trip. Hide the cardboard adders in appropriate 'adder' places so the group learn how to look for adders. This helps a field visit or trip around the grounds flow as the children then have an activity to engage in and keep them busy – even if they won't find any actual snakes!



### 4

When talking to children, whether in a class room or in the field, teach them some accurate and fun facts about adders – especially ones that help them relate to snakes as this develops empathy. Here are some to start you off.

- Adders love sunbathing. They need warmth, to digest their dinner and grow their babies.
- Adders have vertical eye pupils so they can see better in the dark!
- They don't have babies every year – it is so tiring!
- Adders give birth to between 8-12 babies on average – they don't lay eggs
- Adders only eat around 8-10 times a year. Wow!
- Adders can live to be over 30 years old
- We shed our skin all the time, bit by bit. They shed their skins in one go. Easy!
- Adders are usually much smaller than grass snakes and are very shy and timid
- Adders like peace and quiet and don't like to be disturbed

