



Research Information Note

English Nature Research Reports, No. 666

Conservation status of the adder *Vipera berus* in Greater London

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Keywords: biodiversity, adder, reptiles, Greater London

Introduction

The adder *Vipera berus* has suffered drastic declines in Greater London during the twentieth century, and is currently confirmed from four sites. Much of the open habitat adders need has been lost and the remaining habitats are highly fragmented, resulting in isolation and viability issues for the remaining populations.

In 2004 LEHART was commissioned by English Nature as lead for the London Biodiversity Partnership's Reptiles Action Plan to undertake a two part project. The aim was to produce an evaluation of the status of adder in Greater London to inform future conservation action and to produce management briefs to enhance the status of confirmed populations in Greater London.

What was done

The management briefs were written in consultation with local herpetologists and site managers to inform management action and enhance potential adder habitat. Management recommendations were given for the short, medium and long-term in order of priority. An assessment was made of the potential for suitable adder habitat beyond site boundaries. Consideration was made to population viability, as much as there for information available to look at this.

The briefs have been used inform an evaluation of the current status of adder. This was compiled following a literature review, interviews with site managers, local conservationists and herpetologists to produce a current day assessment, comparative to the historic distribution adders in and around Greater London. A list of recommendations for further work has been included within the report.

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Results and conclusions

The status of adder within Greater London is widespread, but rare given that it is restricted to only four widely dispersed sites. However, there are areas of London which are highlighted as a priority for further survey work where there may be further undiscovered populations.

At each site the population size is either low or very low. In the four known populations, medium to long-term (i.e. ten years from now and beyond) inbreeding is considered likely without artificial input of new animals, because of relatively low population size and lack of genetic exchange between populations.

Systematic monitoring of populations is required as well as action to increase area able to support adders. There is considerable potential to enhance the potential habitat for adders and increase status at all four known sites. There may also be opportunities for colonization beyond existing boundaries. Further surveys are required in several areas in London to identify any unidentified populations, for example that may be on land in private ownership.

English Nature's viewpoint

We welcome this report which offers a best guess assessment of the conservation status of adders in London today. In London, the priority for adders is to ensure the future of the few remaining populations is secure and deliver the recommendations within the briefs, as well as continuing to survey potential areas where as yet undiscovered populations may be found.

Selected references

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