

**Adders and grazing**  
**Excerpts from NIBBLERS online discussion group Jan 2007**

Dear all,

We received an enquiry in the GAP office yesterday from a student studying the effect of grazing on adder populations in the Cotswolds. I was wondering if anyone had any experience of this or could offer any useful information. I will forward on any responses.

many thanks, Adam Cormack

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Adam

I forwarded this request to my colleague at Burnham Beeches who keeps an eye on our adders and this is his reply:

Hot topic - and unfortunately some reptile people have rather polarised view that grazing is bad - which is of course rubbish, overgrazing is bad (not grazing on open areas can allow them to completely scrub up and turn to woodland - also bad) - best advice is to

Contact their local ARG group (if there is one) list available on the Web from ARG UK or HCT

Join the following discussion group - RAUK e forum - but be prepared for the odd extreme view on grazing.

Generally adders needs open areas with lots of rough vegetation some scrub and good variety of structure - i.e. not too many flat over grazed lawns - variety in structure is key + survey to know where hibernacula and key adder areas basking/feeding are to ensure the aren't trashed by clearance works (fencing works) or overgrazed.

It would be interesting if the results of the project could be circulated when it is completed.

Helen Read (Corporation of London)

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We have lots of adders and lots of grazing and they Love it! We work closely with a local Adder Expert (Nigel Hand) who is great at directing us in terms of when and where we graze in relation to the migration of the adders from their hibernacula to their feeding grounds.

Feel free to pass on our contacts if they want any more info.

Cheers.

Rob.

Rob Havard  
Conservation Officer  
Malvern Hills Conservators

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I'd agree with the comments from Burnham Beeches. We have had grazing and adder issues with various reptile watchers here because our heathland areas are small. Extreme views or fixed views on grazing are common-place amongst adder enthusiasts and often

adders are the only wildlife of concern. The main approach has been to find the hibernacula and basking sites and protect them. We've also monitored activity at these traditional sites. However, adders are mobile and adaptable to an extent - so if an incremental approach is taken to any scrub clearance and new open areas are created for the snakes to move into in parallel with grazing it should work. Over-grazing must be monitored and also there must be clear vegetation goals - how will success be measured and how important is the other wildlife in comparison with the reptile population? In restoring scarce vegetation it is sometimes not possible to please everybody and short vegetation - important for heather regeneration and sedges and annual plants is not attractive to adders - so a mosaic approach if possible - but difficult on small areas.

Dr Jes Dagley  
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