
NOTES AND COMMENTS

New East Lothian sites for the Adder (*Vipera berus*) found from 19th century records

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RECORDS of Adders in the vicinity of Edinburgh are scarce, though old, unofficial accounts of their presence do exist at Whitadder Reservoir in the Lammermuir Hills, in East Lothian. The Lammermuirs are a range of hills running south-west from six miles south of Dunbar. Partially cultivated and gently sloping, they look unimpressive reptile habitats to those of us accustomed to Highland Adder sites. BHS member Charles Montgomery, a member of the Lothian Amphibian and Reptile Group, researched other old records of Adders mentioned in William Evans's paper to the Royal Physical Society in 1894, entitled '*The Reptiles and Batrachians of the Edinburgh District*'. Members of the group decided to investigate, and a preliminary visit to Whitadder Reservoir in the spring of 2002 proved positive. On 26th April, 2003 several members of the LARG visited Whitadder Reservoir and saw five male and two female adult Adders, together

with a male and female Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and one Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*).

Evans (1894) mentions killing (!) two Adders further up the Whitadder Water at Johnscleugh. The group visited the site on the morning of 10th May 2003, and saw two adult females, and one adult male. In the afternoon we drove further east, to a site called Crichness. Here we found two baby Adders and one very unusual bluish male. This year, on 22nd April, we visited a site only 15 miles east south-east of Edinburgh, Lammerloch Reservoir, a much smaller water body than Whitadder, and two adjacent ponds. We saw two mature males, two mature females and two immature animals whose sex was disputed. A month later we again visited Whitadder Reservoir, but only saw one Adder, a male. We saw no Slow-worms but several Common Lizards, including a very interesting lime green female. In the

Waterbody adjacent to the Lammerloch Reservoir, site of the new East Lothian Adder records. Photograph © C. Montgomery.



Male Adder from area of Lammerloch Reservoir. Photograph © C. Montgomery.



afternoon of the same day we drove down along the boundary river with Borders Region, stopping to visit a marshy wooded area in Monynut Forest where we saw a large male Adder. Presumably animals had moved down from the higher well-drained uplands to the marshy hunting grounds. We assumed that the popularity of the banks of the reservoirs and lochs was because of the abundance of rodents as well as baby lizards for the young snakes to feed upon.

Apart from their intrinsic value, these survey trips serve to highlight the worth of even fairly old records. Information collated by a Victorian naturalist has made it possible for modern

herpetologists to reconfirm many sites and has nudged us in the direction of some 'new' ones. A lot of work remains to be done but the heartening news is that, over 100 years later, all these populations are still there and appear to be thriving.

N.B. Strangely enough, Whitadder in old Scots means 'white water', not 'white adder'.

REFERENCES

- Evans, W. (1894). *The reptiles and batrachians of the Edinburgh district*. Paper given to the Royal Physical Society.

