Britain’s adder population slithers towards extinction

BRITAIN’S only venomous snake is in danger of sliding to extinction, the first ever assessment of its population warned yesterday.

Eleven years of monitoring show that 90 per cent of adder populations are in decline.

At current rates they could be restricted to a handful of UK sites within 10 to 20 years, said Dr Emma Gardner of Reading University.

The biggest threat revealed by the data collected by amphibian and reptile groups of the UK is disturbance from people.

Dr Gardner told The Herpetological Journal that adders are in “serious trouble”.

She said: “Our analysis shows that 90 per cent of the sites surveyed have small populations and on average these small populations are declining. When surveyors visit these sites, they typically record less than 10 adders.”

The snakes are at risk even on nature reserves.

Dr Gardner said: “Mechanical cutting can physically injure or kill adders, and overgrazing removes the cover they need to hide from predators and safely hunt for prey.

“Adders are very faithful to their homes, will hibernate year after year in the same place and often hibernate together. If management operations accidentally destroy these hibernation places, then a whole adder community can be wiped out in one go.”