Are adder bites dangerous?
For most people an adder bite will cause only mild discomfort and swelling but any bite should be regarded as potentially serious and immediate medical advice should be sought. Do not try to catch the snake for identification. To put adder bites in perspective only around 12 people are known to have died from adder bites in the last 100 years whereas several people die from insect stings each year.

Dealing with injured snakes.
In most cases it is best to leave the snake alone. Never attempt to capture an adder contact the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group. Snakes have amazing powers of recovery from even the most horrific injuries.

Snakes and the law.
Both the grass snake and adder are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act as amended. Under this act it is illegal to kill, injure or sell them.

Useful information:
Reptiles in your garden: your questions Answered Leaflet by Natural England
Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG) www.kentarg.org/reptiles/ info@kentarg.org recorder@kentarg.org

Britain has three native species of snake - the grass snake, adder and the very rare smooth snake. Smooth snakes are only found on small numbers of heathland sites in Surrey, Dorset and Hampshire.

Here we look at the adder and grass snake, both found in Kent.
**Habits for Snakes**

**Grass snakes** often live near water, where they swim and feed. They also live in damp woodlands and meadows. For overwintering they like high, dry banks covered with brambles and rabbit burrows, and also garden rockeries. Kent is a stronghold for the grass snake.

**Adders** are found in a variety of habitats but in Kent adders are associated with chalk downland. They are in decline in Kent. They often return to the same places to overwinter in groups.

**How to tell the difference between** a grass snake and an adder?

**Adders** are rarely more than 65cm in length. The usually have a greyish/brown colouration with a continuous black zigzag on their back and roundish blotches on each side. The zigzag is usually preceded with a V-shape mark on the back of the head, though this mark may be X- or H-shaped.

**Grass snakes** are often longer than adders adults reach between 80cm and 120cm. Their background colour is olive-green, grey or brownish with a distinctive, usually whitish-yellow and black, collar. This collar is occasionally absent in larger individuals. Black vertical bars and spots run along each side.

In the grass snake the eye has a round pupil in the adder it is vertical.

**Feeding**

**Grass snakes** feed mainly on frogs and toads, but also eat fish, newts and small rodents. They will occasionally take nesting birds. They swallow their prey head first and usually alive!

**Adders** feed on voles, mice, lizards, nesting birds, eggs, frogs and toads, and insect larvae. The adder injects its prey with venom and then follows it, waiting for it to die.

**A grass snake is eating my goldfish what can I do?**

The snake could be removed to another suitable habitat, but we would not encourage this. Nothing will deter a grass snake from visiting a pond. Any netting is likely to trap the snake, so why not enjoy the honour of being visited by such a lovely animal. For a thriving wildlife pond goldfish are best left out anyway as they eat everything!

**Snakes and hibernation.**

Snakes hibernate any time from the end of September onwards, depending on the weather. They may hibernate underground using, for example, the holes made by mammals or tree roots. They may also hibernate in manure heaps, rock piles and hedgerows. They may hibernate singly or in groups.

**Slow worms.**

No, slow worms are not snakes but legless lizards, and may be up to 45cm in length. They look like a snakes but have eyelids and a sheddable tail. Slow worms are semi-nocturnal and feed on slugs, snails and insects. They have a polished appearance with shades of coppery gold and vivid dark brown sides when young. They are far more common than adders or grass snakes, and Kent is a stronghold for them.

**Poisonous British snakes.**

Of the three British snakes, only the adder is venomous. An adder will not bite unless provoked. Never disturb or try to pick up an adder.

A grass snake may bite if seriously provoked, but the bite is not harmful. It is more likely to spray an evil-smelling liquid from its rear end!