

badger

Description of Species

The badger (*Meles meles*) is an instantly recognizable member of the British fauna with a black and white striped head and bulky grey body.

Sandy coloured badgers also occur in a band across N.E. Wales. Adult badgers grow up to a metre long and males can weigh up to 14 kg. The badger belongs to the family Mustelidae, a group of mammals possessing a musk gland, the secretion of which is used for communication. British badgers are classed as carnivores but are in fact omnivorous having a varied diet of nuts, berries, cereals, insects, beetles and small mammals as well as its staple diet of earthworms.

Legislation

The following acts give legal protection to both badgers and their setts:

- *Cruelty to Animals Act 1911*
- *The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981*
- *The Protection of Badgers Act 1992*
- *Cruelty to Wild Mammals Act 1996*



Badger

Picture courtesy of Steve Jackson

Badgers use a variety of habitats but preference is given to native woodlands and copses surrounded by pasture with well drained soil. Main setts can have from one to about 40 entrances and some have been in use for many centuries. Badgers are powerful diggers (they may build new setts on development land so ecological surveys should be up-to-date). Badgers are mainly nocturnal. They do not hibernate but often stay below ground for long periods in winter during severe weather conditions.

Badgers mate throughout the year but pregnancy starts at the onset of winter when the previously fertilized cells implant into the sow's uterus. Cubs are born mainly in February with two or three usually surviving to emerge about eight weeks later. The cubs

are not weaned for a further few weeks. (This is the main reason why the Countryside Council for Wales states that disturbing badgers should be avoided completely between December and June inclusive).

Current Status and Distribution

United Kingdom

The badger is found throughout most of Britain. Its decline was reversed in the 1980s following protective legislation and better control of toxic chemicals such as sheep-dip. The National Badger Survey (Cresswell et al. 1990) estimated that there are 43,000 social groups for the total population of Great Britain. On the assumption that there are about six



adult badgers per social group, we have around 250 000 adult badgers in Britain. The population is self-regulating in conjunction with the carrying capacity of the land (quality of feeding areas). Substantial areas of lowland Britain have not yet been re-colonized by badgers.

The UK population is of international importance since the badger is declining over much of its range throughout Europe. The importance of the badger to the general public is shown by the fact that there are over 80 badger groups in Britain (National Federation of Badger Groups, Dec 2001) all working for the conservation of badgers and their habitat. Badgers are the archetypal flagship species. Eco-tourism has already put a monetary value on badgers but their intrinsic value to the quality of life of countless people cannot be measured. The badger is a robust species, having survived much abuse; any decline can be used as an indicator giving a severe warning about the mismanagement of our countryside.



badger

Wrexham

Geoffrey Spencer's sett records for the Mammal Society showed a decline in the population during the 1970s. The Clwyd Badger Group's sett records have subsequently shown a general recovery in the population. However, local declines continue in some areas mainly due to illegal persecution. Survey work followed by mitigation measures have helped to relieve development pressures, although roads continue to be a major problem, especially where they cross wildlife corridors.

Factors causing loss

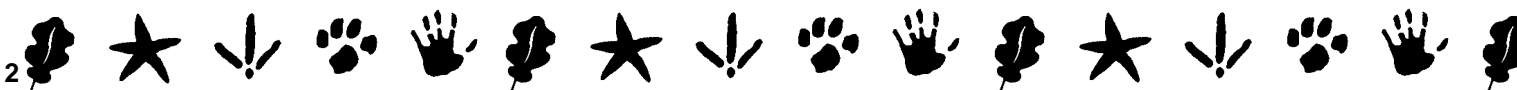
- *Changes in land use resulting in the loss of setts and foraging areas.*
- *The fragmentation of wildlife corridors by new roads.*
- *Road traffic, estimated to kill 50,000 badgers in Britain annually.*
- *Agricultural driven incentives to bring farm land into cultivation resulting in loss of sett sites and seasonal food items.*
- *Illegal persecution. Badger digging and baiting still continue but snaring, lamping, poisoning and sett hard-stopping are major concerns. Badgers are still being mutilated in 'legal' snares.*
- *Pollution and inadvertent poisoning from organic slurry and silage run off from farms; and forestry and agricultural chemicals.*

- *Misapprehension concerning the current TB status of badgers, even though this has not been an issue in N Wales. There have been anecdotal reports of individuals killing badgers in the belief that badgers transmit bovine TB to cattle. The means of transmission of this disease has been widely investigated over many years and to date the causal link of badgers has not been made.*
- *Degradation of woods and copses due to livestock grazing preventing natural regeneration and shrinkage of woodlands due to poor silvicultural practice.*
- *Sections of the Llangollen canal with concrete vertical sides form a barrier to badgers and other wildlife preventing them from climbing out.*

Current and Recent Action

UK/Wales Action

- The National Federation of Badger Groups (NFBG), the Mammal Society, CCW and the RSPCA all produce booklets on badger related problems.
- The People's Trust for Endangered Species commissioned "Changes in the British badger population, 1988 to 1997" from Professor Harris, Bristol University.
- The appointments of a Wildlife and Environmental Officer and of Divisional Wildlife Officers by the North Wales Police have benefited wildlife generally and badgers in particular.



Local Action

- Clwyd Badger Group (CBG) monitors local planning applications and requests ecological surveys when badger sett records indicate the need. CBG liaises with forestry officials to avoid inadvertent damage to setts.
- CBG continually records and updates badger sett records in NE Wales. These are passed on to the Mammal Society and are also available to all authorities as the need arises, subject to confidentiality agreements.
- CBG requests mitigation measures to be carried out where appropriate, e.g. artificial setts to replace lost setts and badger tunnels and fencing where new roads cross well used badger paths. These measures have been provided with great success except where proper specifications have not been adhered to.

Objectives and Targets

- 1** *Protect and enhance badger populations.*
- 2** *Minimize the destruction of wildlife corridors.*
- 3** *Establish the current status and distribution of badgers.*
- 4** *Enhance badger habitats.*



Woodland and grassland habitat for badgers

*Links to Other Action Plans***Wrexham Species Action Plans:**

- Otter

Wrexham Habitat Action Plans:

- River, stream and canal
- Hedgerow*
- Woodland
- Veteran trees and wood pasture
- Derelict & industrial land

Other Plans:

- WCBC Countryside Strategy
- Adjacent LBAPs (Denbighshire, Flintshire, Conwy, Powys, Cheshire)

N.B. * to be published 2004

Proposed Action with Lead Agencies

Action	Objectives	Partners	Target
Policy & Legislation			
Prevent weakening of wildlife legislation, by appealing against stated cases that would have adverse consequences for the badgers or those seeking to protect it.	1	NFGB	Ongoing
Encourage habitat enhancement by lobbying to support EU grants for sustainable farming and conservation of wildlife habitat, especially linear links.	1, 4	NFBG, RSPB, FWAG	Ongoing
Species/Site Safeguard and Management			
Ensure adequate current badger surveys are carried out when changes in badger habitat land use eg planning applications are proposed.	1, 3	WCBC	Ongoing
Improve quality of badger habitat to compensate for loss due to development.	1, 4	WCBC	Ongoing
Minimize disruption of wildlife corridors along water courses by ensuring that bridges are requested in preference to culverts.	1, 2	WCBC, CCW, EAW HTRA	2004
Encourage habitat restoration and habitat creation projects.	1, 4	WCBC, ARAD	Average 1 project per yr
Seek opportunities to reduce road deaths by use of underpasses and signs.	1	HTRA, WCBC	Ongoing



<i>Proposed Action with Lead Agencies</i>			
Action	Objectives	Partners	Target
Provide injured badgers with appropriate care.		CBG, Vets	Ongoing
Work with authorities to provide escape routes for badgers and other animals from waterways with vertical sides.	1	BW, WCBC	Ongoing
Maintain liaison with the Countryside Ranger Service.	1, 4	WCBC, DUWG	Ongoing
Reduce illegal persecution through liaison with the public including land owners, game keepers, farmers, estate and reserve managers.	1, 3	NT, WT, NWWT	Ongoing
Advice			
Provide advice to Local Authorities on planning applications which may involve badgers.	1, 2	WCBC, CBG	Ongoing
Provide advice notes on conservation management for landowners and developers.	2	CCW, NFBG, WCBC	As required
Uphold the law relating to badgers and Provide expert witnesses for offences under the Badger's Act	1	WLO, NFBG	Ongoing
Communication and Publicity			
Raise awareness of the continuing threat of persecution.	1	NFBG, WLO	Ongoing
Raise awareness of badger conservation by the production of posters, leaflets, and press releases.	1, 3	NFBG	Ongoing
Increase public understanding of the relationship between badgers and bovine TB and of other high profile issues.	1	NFBG	Ongoing
Research and Monitoring			
Maintain and update badger sett records on card and spreadsheets.	1, 3	Mammal Society	Ongoing
Monitor all known and accessible badger setts so date of most recent visit no earlier than 1990.	1, 3	Mammal Society, CBG	By end of 2003
Convert spreadsheets of badger data to a database.	3	CBG	End of 2003
Joint survey work with Forest Enterprise, Tilhill and other land owners or groups on request.	1, 3	FE, WCBC, WT EAW	Ongoing
Encourage the public to report badger related incident and badger sett information.	1, 3	CBG	Ongoing
Train people in badger field work.	3	CBG	Ongoing
Keep records of badger related offences.	1	WLO, NFBG	Ongoing
Keep records of badger road traffic accidents.	2	NFBG	Ongoing

Abbreviations for table ADRAD - Agriculture & Rural Affairs Department, BW - British Waterways, CBG - Clwyd Badger Group, DUWG - Deeside Urban Wildlife Group, EAW - Environment Agency for Wales, FE - Forest Enterprise, FWAG - Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, HRTA - Highways Trunk Roads Agency, NFBG - National Federation of Badger Groups, NT - National Trust, NWWT - North Wales Wildlife Trust, RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WCBC - Wrexham County Borough Council, WLO - Wildlife Liaison Officer, WT - Woodland Trust.

Further information

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Illustrations courtesy of English Nature. Author: Betty Lee, Clwyd Badger Group

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A large print version of this Plan is available.
Please call 01978 292019.

