

Badger (*Meles meles*)

Other names: Eurasian Badger, broc

Why are we looking for it?

It is a general truth that it is only possible for steps to be taken to conserve wildlife if we know it is there. It is therefore important that we record both badgers and their setts so that this information is available when Local Authorities are considering planning applications or when Environmental Consultants are preparing Ecological assessments for major developments like housing estates or wind farms.

At the present time, The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) holds 3714 records for badgers in the Lothians and Borders. However, we are aware that recording varies markedly between Local Authority areas, with recording of badgers in the Scottish Borders, for example, still in its infancy. By launching a badger survey, we hope to build on our understanding of where the species is found and continue to provide this vital information to recognised bodies for conservation work. It will also provide a baseline for monitoring future change in the badger population.

Identification features

Badger

- body 75–93cm long, shoulder height 30cm
- stout squat body, long tapering muzzle, short legs and a short blunt tail with a white tip, also white fringe to ears
- head white with conspicuous black stripe either side running through eyes
- rough coat appears uniformly grey from distance
- on closer inspection coat is silver-grey above, while the underparts and legs are black
- hairs are white at base and tip, black in middle



Badgers (*Meles meles*) © Chris Sydes

Sett, tracks and signs

- sett commonly found in **deciduous woodland and copses**, often on slopes
- sett typically has several entrance holes, several metres apart
- holes are large and **broader than tall**, unlike fox holes which are taller and narrower
- there is a **mound of earth** at main entrance to sett
- there may be evidence of discarded **bedding** (bracken or hay) outside sett entrance
- **prints** with **five short toes**, 35mm wide x 45mm long (N.B. the fifth toe may not show). Visible claw marks from forefeet.
- faeces usually deposited in shallow, uncovered pits dug out by the badger (**latrines**)
- **hairs** (coloured white, black, white) may be found on barbed-wire fences
- small holes in the soil called **snuffle pits**, about the size of the badger's nose, can be found throughout the year where the badger has been feeding. These are distinguished from almost identical pits produced by rabbits by the lack of small spherical droppings produced by rabbits.
- **paths** are created by badgers that regularly move through an area. These are not always easily distinguished from tracks made by other animals, so other signs should be looked for.

Ecology

Badgers are territorial and mainly nocturnal, spending the day sleeping below ground. They live in social groups based on an underground sett, which consists of a labyrinth of tunnels and chambers. This is kept clean by digging dung pits or latrines outside the sett. These are also used to mark territorial boundaries.

Individuals tend to forage for food singly. They have a fairly wide diet, depending on availability, and will travel 2 miles or more to find food. They will eat acorns, wild fruits, grass, roots, beetles, night-flying moths, earthworms, slugs and will also dig out the nests of bumblebees and wasps for grubs. They will also take small mammals and young birds that have fallen out of their nests.

Mating usually occurs in spring, but may occur at any time of year. One litter a year is usual with 2-3 cubs, but can be 1-5 cubs.

Badgers do not hibernate but become semi-dormant. By putting on fat reserves in the autumn, it is not necessary for them to feed daily.

Life expectancy is more than 12 years.

Threats

The main threat to the badger is humans. Perhaps the worst act against badgers is illegal badger-baiting, which is still a problem in the Lothians and Borders, as in other parts of the UK. This barbaric 'sport' involves the badger being injured in some way before put with the dog for a fight.

More recent threats to the badger population are road traffic, habitat destruction and development. It is estimated that in Britain over 40,000 badgers are killed on the roads annually, while 9,000 are killed by digging and baiting and 30,000 badgers killed by shooting and gassing in the last 17 years.

References

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