

Introduction

Badgers are one of Britain's most popular mammals. They bring pleasure to thousands of people and are a poignant symbol of the British countryside.

Badgers emerge at dusk from their network of tunnels called a "sett". They have an excellent sense of smell and their hearing is also good. Their favourite food is worms which they eat at night, sucking the worms up from the ground like spaghetti. Badgers have powerful forelegs and claws for digging and extending their setts, some of which are very old. One sett even featured in the Domesday book. Badgers have lived in Britain since the Ice Age, but the pressures on them today have never been greater.

It is a sad fact that many thousands of badgers are killed each year. An estimated 10,000 badgers are cruelly baited with dogs and dug out of their setts. Other badgers die in agony in snares, or are poisoned or shot, while over 50,000 are killed on the roads. Many badgers lose their setts and vital feeding areas to building development. There are also calls to kill badgers in the mistaken belief that this will stop cattle being infected with bovine tuberculosis.

Badger Trust is the leading voice for badgers in Britain. It is a charity which actively promotes the conservation and protection of badgers. Badger Trust is the umbrella organisation for around 60 local voluntary groups who work for badgers in their area. It provides advice on all issues and campaigns for Britain's badgers at both a national and international level. Through a special section in our newsletter, *Badger News*, we help young people to enjoy learning about badgers. We also use the badger, one of Britain's best-loved mammals, to enhance youngsters' awareness of other wildlife and the wider environment. Adults and children can join Badger Trust. Supporters receive a newsletter packed with information on badgers, current events and campaigns.

Badger Trust addresses specific issues including: bovine TB in cattle; the illegal persecution of badgers; the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned badgers as well as road and housing development. Badger Trust also works closely with Police Wildlife Crime Officers, MPs, the Government's nature conservation advisors, the RSPCA, the Wildlife Trusts and other welfare and conservation organisations involved with badgers.



About Badgers

Appearance and general characteristics

Badgers are part of the weasel family that includes otter, weasel, stoat, polecat and pine marten. Badgers are powerful animals and adapted to living underground in a sett that they dig with their strong claws. They have a long wedge shaped body whose length is about 1 metre, nose to tail. They weigh from 8 to 12 kilograms with males usually heavier than females. Most badgers are dark grey with a black and white striped head. They have a large, rubbery nose which they use to forage for food and gather information. Their eyes are small and their eye-sight is not good.

Badgers mate at any time of year, but the embryo does not implant in the womb and start growing until winter. This is called 'delayed implantation' and means that most cubs are born from January to March. The average number of cubs is 2 to 3. At birth they are about 12 cm long with fine fur and their eyes are closed for the first few weeks. Cubs come above ground at 8 to 10 weeks and are suckled for at least 12 weeks. They are not independent from their mothers until about 15 weeks of age.

Diet

Badgers are omnivores and eat a wide range of plants such as fruit, berries and cereals and animals such as worms, insects and small mammals. If you want to feed badgers you should only give them small amounts of dog food, fruit, peanuts and raisins. Do not give them milk or sugary food.

Signs

Badger setts have entrances that are a characteristic shape like a D on its side. Fox and rabbit holes are smaller and higher than they are wide. Badger entrances have large heaps of spoil that contain dried vegetation that badgers use for bedding. Badgers make strong paths and dig holes for their droppings. Badger Trust can provide more information about badgers and has a list of places where you can watch badgers.



Badger Trust
P.O. Box 708
East Grinstead RH19 2WN
T: 08458 287878
W: www.badgertrust.org.uk
E: enquiries@badgertrust.org.uk



March 2009

The Badger's Year

JANUARY

S Badgers are less active and spend more time underground due to the colder weather and less food being available.
M
T
W Sows are pregnant and some give birth. Bedding may be
Th aired outside the sett
F entrances.
S



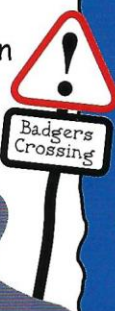
FEBRUARY

S Most pregnant females give birth to two or three cubs.
M There is more mating and
T boar badgers travel over
W their own and neighbouring
Th group territories looking for
F females.
S



MARCH

S Badgers are more active as the weather warms up and more food is available.
M
T There is a large increase in the numbers of badgers
W killed on the roads in the
Th spring months. Cubs still depend
F completely on
S their mothers.

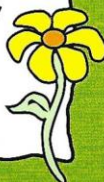


APRIL

S Spring is in full swing and food, particularly the badgers' favourite earthworms, is plentiful. Badger cubs explore the sett entrances and may emerge, tempted by the new scents and sounds outside. The sow protects her cubs and makes sure they stay close to the sett.
M
T
W
Th
F
S

MAY

S May is a good time to start watching badgers. The weather is warmer and they are beginning to emerge in daylight. Cubs are now three to four months old and come above ground to explore around the sett and to play with other badgers.
M
T
W
Th



JUNE

S By the end of June many cubs are weaned and know their way about their territory. They are confident enough to forage with other members of their group or alone. In June badgers may sleep in day nests above ground.
M
T
W
Th
F
S



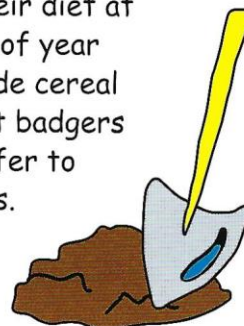
JULY

S Prolonged dry weather can have a serious impact on badgers and may even cause starvation. Hungry badgers may be seen foraging in the daytime. Cubs are half the weight of their parents and should be growing fast.



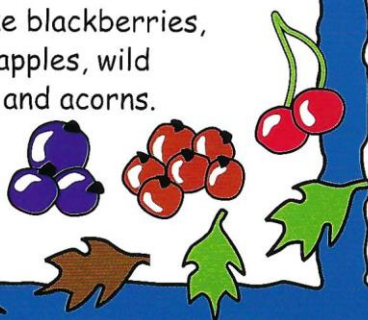
AUGUST

S Badgers spend a lot of time digging and extending their setts. Their diet at this time of year may include cereal crops, but badgers much prefer to eat worms.



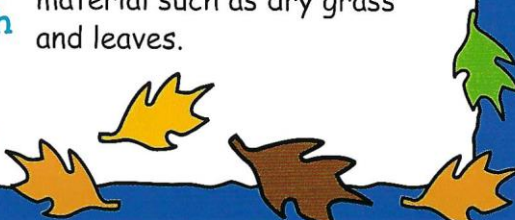
SEPTEMBER

S Late summer and autumn bring extra food sources such as the wasp grubs (taken from the nests), insect larvae and fruits like blackberries, windfall apples, wild cherries and acorns.



OCTOBER

S Badgers feast on fruits and other food to put on fat reserves for the winter. They also prepare their setts by excavating tunnels and by bringing in fresh bedding material such as dry grass and leaves.



NOVEMBER

S From November badger watching can get more difficult as the times when badgers emerge from their setts can change from night to night. Although badgers do not hibernate they become less active and sleep more as food becomes harder to find.

DECEMBER

S Badgers sleep longer and deeper. This inactivity coincides with an important phase in the badger's breeding cycle. Sows mate at any time of the year, but fertilised eggs don't implant in the womb and develop until winter. This is called delayed implantation.



Badger Trust
P.O. Box 708
East Grinstead RH19 2WN
T: 08458 287878
W: www.badgertrust.org.uk
E: enquiries@badgertrust.org.uk