

# Naturewatch

## Fact Sheet on Cruelty to Badgers

### Threats to Badgers

Badgers in Britain are threatened by both legal and illegal activities:

- **Legal activities**, subject to compliance with strict guidelines within specific legislation, include road and housing development, forestry and agricultural operations, sett-stopping by foxhunts. The Government has also been killing thousands of badgers in a controversial experiment to find out whether they infect cattle with Bovine TB.
- **Illegal threats** to badgers include badger-digging and baiting; snaring; poisoning (*including the misuse of pesticides*); lamping and sett interference.
- In addition, a large number of badgers are the victims of road traffic accidents each year (*official estimate 50,000 - source NFBG*). Various 'pest control' methods, usually targeted at foxes and rabbits, also cause the death of unknown numbers of badgers. Some of these deaths occur by accident, but on occasions their death is deliberate.



Image © Buckinghamshire badger group

### Quick Facts

- The British Population of Badgers is estimated to be in the region of 300,000 to 400,000 badgers (*source English Nature*)
- About 50,000 badgers are killed every year in road traffic accidents. *Source: NFBG*
- An estimated 10,000 Badgers are killed illegally each year by badger baiting and digging. *Source: Research carried out by Prof. Stephen Harris, Bristol University, together with Penny Creswell and Don Jefferies of the Nature Conservancy Council.*

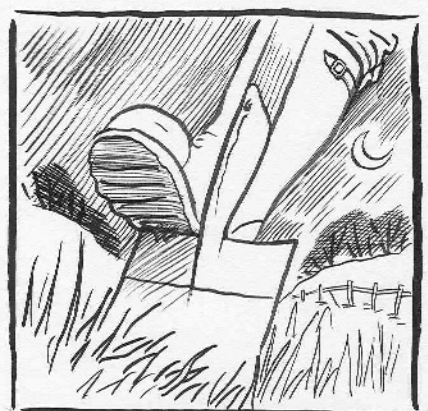
### Badger Baiting and Digging

Small terriers are sent down into a badger sett to locate a badger and hold it at bay. The men then dig their way down to their quarry and drag the badger out of the sett. Many diggers attach a radio transmitter to the dog's collar before sending it below ground so that they can use a radio receiver/locator to determine the exact location of the dog.

There are two types of badger baiters. The first who do it just for the pleasure of killing the badger on the spot and no money is involved. If it's lucky the badger will be shot but usually the men will set their terriers on the badger and watch it suffer a long and agonising death, stabbing it with shovels for good measure. At times, the dogs and the badgers may die when the sett collapses and suffocates them. (Many badger groups

have fortified their local setts with concrete to protect the badgers.)

The second type of badger baiting involves gambling where large sums of money can change hands. When the badger is dug out of the sett, it is put in a bag or a cage and taken away to be baited later. The



baiting will take place somewhere quiet, such as a barn, shed or cellar in which there is a makeshift arena, a ring or pit, from which the badger cannot escape. Dogs are then set upon it. Even if it is lucky enough to get the better of one dog, the owner may hit or otherwise injure the badger in order to 'protect his pet'. Ultimately, no matter how well it tries to defend itself, the badger's fate is sealed. The badger, through injury and exhaustion, will not be able to fight any longer. The baiters will then kill the badger usually by clubbing or shooting it. Gambling is always involved and a winning dog's value will rise - along with the price of its puppies. An anonymous letter received by Michael Sharratt of Badger Watch & Rescue in Dyfed states that badgers are being caught and sold for about £500 for baiting.

Badger baiting was a form of public entertainment in the early 19th century, and as such dates back to medieval times. Often taking place in the back yards of taverns, it was organised in order to increase the sales of beer by drawing in a greater crowd. A badger was put into a barrel which was laid on its side. Whichever dog drew the badger out first was the winner.

Badgers are shy and peaceful animals and not normally aggressive, but will defend themselves if cornered or provoked. A badger has great strength and a blow from one of its vicious claws can do serious harm.

### Lamping and Shooting

Lamping is the hunting of animals at night with the aid of bright lights - badgers are dazzled while they are feeding on fields. Some 'lampers' use lurchers or other similar dogs to take the quarry that they dazzle while others mount their spotlights on high-powered firearms and simply shoot their victims.

### Snaring and Trapping

Snaring badgers and other protected species is prohibited in section 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but this is difficult to enforce as long as some snaring is legal. The use of self-locking snares is prohibited under this Act but the use of free-running snares is permitted to catch foxes and rabbits provided they are inspected at least once every 24 hours. The free running snare is intended as a restraining device and should not, if used lawfully, normally cause bodily injury. Snares or traps are indiscriminate and often catch badgers when they are not the intended victims (*although illegal in the UK, self-locking snares are still used and cause severe injuries to a variety of animals species - caught by the neck or round the body the animal struggles to get free causing the snare to*

*tighten and cut deeper into the animal's flesh causing a lingering, painful death).*

## Poisoning and Gassing

Some landowners and gamekeepers use poisoned baits to catch predators of game and livestock. However, like snares, poisons can cause great suffering and are indiscriminate, often killing animals other than the intended victims. Badgers are also gassed by accident when inexperienced pest controllers mistake badger setts for rabbit warrens. However, without doubt, the deliberate gassing of badger setts does occur. *The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 prohibit the use of unapproved products to deter or kill animals, including badgers. The only repellent approved for use to deter badgers is Renardine. If used at the sett, rather than on lawn, for example, a licence is required otherwise there will be an offence of sett interference.*

## Interference with and destruction of setts

Landowners who for one reason or another want to rid their land of badgers, will sometimes target badger setts. There have been several occasions when strong substances such as slurry or diesel oil have been poured into sett entrances to kill badgers by drowning them. Every year there are cases of setts being damaged or destroyed.

## Fox Hunting

Until the Hunting Act came into force, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 permitted named persons within fox hunts to obstruct the entrances of badger setts to prevent foxes seeking refuge underground during a hunt. Although the Act incorporates strict guidelines as to how and when this can be done without causing harm to the badgers, badger groups are still finding setts blocked illegally causing badgers to be suffocated underground or driven from their setts.

Hunt personnel, usually terrier men, were allowed to dig foxes from their earths which often means badger setts are damaged or destroyed. Badgers can also be injured, or even killed, when foxes are dug out of badger setts. Digging for foxes was the most common cover used by badger diggers.

## The History of Badger Baiting & Digging

Badger Baiting was made illegal in 1835, but the 'sport' of badger digging remained legal. Badger digging continued to be so popular that in the 1960's the badger population was believed to be under threat and in decline. Badgers were first protected in Britain by the Badger Act 1973 (amended in 1981 and 1985), designed to stop widespread persecution but has done little to help. At that time, the legislation protected badgers but not their setts and so, in October 1991, a further Badger Protection Act was introduced to protect badger setts as well. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992, consolidated and improved previous legislation. This protection has always been acknowledged to be welfare-based: that is, it is intended to defend the species against cruelty such as badger baiting rather than to conserve it for ecological reasons.

## Update: Badgers and Bovine TB

The Government has been involved in a controversial field trial to investigate the effect of culling on the spread of bovine TB in cattle. Although this is not an issue on which we are actively campaigning, we recognise that a fact sheet on badgers would not be complete without some discussion of this.

- We accept that bovine TB in badgers is one of the factors influencing the spread of the disease in cattle. The evidence that it is a factor at some level is hard to avoid – but how it compares with other factors is less obvious.

Other species have also been shown to harbour the disease, although they are less of a threat to cattle.

- By far the biggest single factor affecting the spread of the disease in cattle (as revealed by a team led by Dr. Wint at the University of Oxford and reported in *Nature* in May 2005) is the movement of cattle around the UK.



The work of the Independent Scientific Group, led by Drs. Christl Donnelly and Rosie Woodroffe, who presented their results in *Nature* and reported to the Government, showed that there are significant limitations to the effectiveness of badger culling:

- While there are measurable decreases in the incidence of the disease within the culled areas, these are outweighed by edge effects, whereby bovine TB increases in the surrounding regions;
- However, although the edge effects are reduced if culling takes place in larger areas, there are substantially greater problems in ensuring that it is both fully implemented and free of interference. This was also found in the attempt to eradicate possums in New Zealand, which had bovine TB.

We have every sympathy with the farming community following the three disasters of BSE, FMD and bTB, and fully understand their desire to eradicate the problem. However, from the above evidence we conclude that:

- The scientific case for badger culling as an effective solution to bovine TB has not been made. The limited effectiveness within small areas is countered by edge effects, and within larger areas it is unworkable.
- Badgers must not be turned into a convenient scapegoat, however understandable it may be for the farming community to want to find one. Eradicating them will not eradicate the disease.
- The movement of cattle must be sorted out satisfactorily, with rigorous pre- and post-movement testing. Movement restrictions may be tough on the farming community, but this is the only method that both has a dramatic impact on the incidence of bovine TB and is workable over large areas.

*The line drawings are by Steve Hutton.*

*This fact sheet has been provided as a service to visitors of our web-site. If you found it helpful, please consider making a donation to help us continue in our campaign against animal cruelty.*

*For more information about our campaigns on badger cruelty and wildlife crime, visit our website at <http://www.naturewatch.org/>*

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