

INFORMATION SHEET

An Environmental Protection Team Service

Badger

Meles meles

Distribution & Habitat The (Eurasian) badger is distributed throughout Europe and much of Asia. It is found throughout mainland Britain in a wide variety of habitats including woodland, hedgerows, farmland and some suburban areas.

Badgers live in underground burrow systems known as setts. These can be single holes with a short tunnel, or multiple holes with a labyrinthine tunnel system. Setts are usually excavated beneath roads, railway lines, farm buildings, houses and other buildings.

Biology Badgers are nocturnal, but may on occasions lie above ground in undisturbed locations. They live in social groups of usually six to nine adults. The group defends a territory, the boundaries of which are marked with dung pits and latrine sites. There are usually several setts within a territory. There is normally a large main sett and several subsidiary setts.

In mid February, following delayed implantation of the embryos, the cubs first emerge above ground at about eight weeks old. They are fully weaned at 4-5 months.

Protected Status Despite being relatively common, particularly in southern and western England and Wales, the badger has a high level of legal protection, in the form of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The Act protects not only individual badgers, but also their setts. A sett is defined as any place that a badger currently occupies, or has recently occupied. The Act is designed to stop the cruel 'sport' of badger baiting. The Act allows relevant authorities to issue licences to work with or near badgers.

Licences from DEFRA in England, WOAD in Wales and SOAEFD in Scotland are required where actions need to be taken in respect of badger setts that are endangering life, causing economic loss or damage to property, in the midst of forestry operations or affecting drainage schemes. Licences will only be granted outside of the 1 July to 30 November 'open season' if the need is sufficiently urgent.

English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage licence operations that might affect, or to be carried out in the vicinity (typically within 30m) of, badger setts on development sites, or in situations where badgers are affecting scheduled ancient monuments. Licences will only be granted for work on, or near, setts during the 'open season', 1 July to 30 November.

Working with or near badgers can be an emotive issue. Seek the advice of the appropriate licensing authority, professional badger

consultants such as ADAS Wildlife Consultants, or the local badger group before embarking on any course of action that might affect badgers or their setts.

Importance Badger excavations beneath roads, railway lines, buildings, fields and gardens can cause damage.

Badgers foraging activity can damage pasture, crops, lawns, golf course and amenity areas, as they dig for leatherjackets, cockchafers or other insect larvae. Significant damage can be caused to high value crops such as grapes, strawberries and sweet corn. Damage to cereal crops and forage maize is rarely as severe as it appears.

Badgers can kill livestock, particularly chickens if they get in to a hen house.

Prevention of Damage & Control

Setts that are causing damage can be 'closed' (the badgers evicted) under licence. Licences are not issued to kill badgers under these circumstances. Once a sett is closed, usually using one-way badger gates, the area may have to be proofed to prevent re-excavation by badgers.

The use of electric fencing is the most effective way of preventing damage to crops or gardens. Otherwise damage due to badger foraging activity can be difficult to prevent. Repellents, which must be Approved products, are of variable effectiveness and are seldom applicable on a large scale. Where badgers are foraging for underground insect larvae, insecticidal treatments can reduce the attraction.

Where killing of penned livestock is a problem, effective proofing is the best remedy. Possible actions to prevent the suspected killing of livestock in the field should be discussed with the local agriculture department office. Licences to kill badgers that are taking livestock are only rarely granted.

Legislation **Protection of Badgers Act 1992:** Protects badgers and their setts, but allows certain actions to be taken under licence from the relevant government departments.