

# THE BADGER

*Meles meles*

## GENERAL

- The badger belongs to the Mustelidae family of carnivores, along with other musk-bearing mammals, including otters and weasels. The male is called a boar, the female a sow, and the young, cubs. It is distributed throughout Europe and Asia north of the Himalayas, in the whole of Britain and Ireland but most common in southern and south-western England. It is widespread and sometimes common in certain parts of Kent.
- It is a shy animal and is rarely seen, as it lives in an underground home called a sett, and usually only appears after dark, although it can be seen at dawn and dusk in summer.
- It has no natural predators apart from man, who destroys its natural habitat by changes of land use for a variety of developments. Badgers are killed on roads and electrified railway lines, caught in snares, and die by poisoned bait laid down to kill other animals. They are also killed or maimed in the illegal and horrific 'sport' of badger-baiting. This barbaric activity still takes place in Kent, despite the fact that badgers and their setts are protected by law.
- The name badger is probably derived from the French word, 'becheur' or 'digger'. Old names include earthpig, grey/gray in Kent and Essex, pate (Yorkshire), bawson (south-west England), brock (Midlands) and broc (Scotland).

## RECOGNITION AND DIMENSIONS

- An adult male badger is about a metre (39") long and weighs approx. 12/13kg (26lb). Females are slightly smaller and weigh about 10/11kg.
- They are easily recognised by the distinctive facial patterning of longitudinal black and white stripes. The male often has a wider head at maturity than the female. The body looks grey. A few are 'ginger' (erythristic) or white/cream (albino/semi-albino).

## HABITAT AND HOME

### Habits

- Badgers regularly collect grass, leaves etc. for bedding, but unusual materials are sometimes used such as cardboard or newspaper in urban areas.
- They use a well-defined path network for much of their travels, sometimes with each animal having its own preferred feeding areas.
- It is usually a quiet animal, but is capable of being very vocal at times. Individuals may communicate using soft, almost cat-like purrs, cubs may 'whicker' in a very distinctive way, and occasionally badgers emit a frightening scream.

### Cubs

- Badger cubs need time to grow to a good size and put on plenty of body fat if they are to survive a long, cold winter, so they are likely to stand the best chance if they are born early in the year. Nature ensures this happens with badgers in a most interesting way, without interfering with their ability to mate whenever they like through out the year. (Often this is immediately after the birth of the cubs.) Once fertilised, the egg undergoes some limited cell division but this 'blastocyst', as it is known, does not implant in the uterus straight away, but normally stays unattached until November or December. This delayed implantation ensures that the vast majority of cubs are born in January or February.
- Litters range from 2-6. Cubs are born blind, and make their first appearance above ground at about eight weeks old, in late March/April, not being fully nocturnal until about August. Play is very important for their development. A badger can live up to 15 years, but in Kent it may survive only a few years as so many are killed on the roads.

### Habitat

- Badgers are usually found in well-drained soils in mixed-use countryside, less frequently in large forests, on moors, or in marshes, unless drained. They are common in Kent. A small colony of badgers at Dungeness is pink as a result of a limited gene pool. There are urban populations in some towns such as Dover, Hastings, Tunbridge Wells and Bristol.

- Home is a sett/holt/earth/lair, and is recognisable by a hole larger than 24cm diam. (10"), with a heap of spoil outside. Also bedding material, distinctive badger hairs, lack of fox smell or food remains nearby. But fox, badger and rabbit often live in separate parts a large sett.

## FOOD AND FEEDING HABITS

- A badger's diet varies with the time of the year, but is mainly earthworms, which make up about 49%. The rest of their diet can be broken down as follows: 18% insects, 10% cereals, 8% mammals, 6% fruit, 3% birds and eggs, green plants and others. They are foragers rather than hunters and are true omnivores. They are the only animal which can successfully 'undo' a hedgehog, and relish a wasp's nest. They are opportunists and will take advantage of sick or mislaid stock, e.g. lambs. Rarely a rogue badger may kill deliberately, but this is not common.
- The badger's eyesight is poor and they find their food by smell and hearing.

## HIBERNATION

- Badgers do not hibernate in the way hedgehogs do, but they are less active in very cold spells, and have the ability to survive underground for days without food.

## BADGER SIGNS

- To the experienced eye there are many signs which tell of badger activity. These include footprints in soft mud or snow, scratch marks on trees, badger hairs on bramble or barbed wire, and communal dung pits where they regularly deposit their droppings.

## THE LAW

- Badgers and their setts are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Other than in exceptional circumstances it is illegal to possess a dead badger, or any part of a dead badger; and it is illegal to sell or have in your possession or under your

control a live badger. However, there are still those prepared to disregard the law, and flout it for their own purposes.

### PROBLEMS

- The badger's tendency to root about for worms in lawns, trample crops and garden plants, or scratch trees, is bound to bring him into conflict with man from time to time. And particularly in Kent, the badger's territory is in constant threat from new roads, motorways, railways and housing developments. Landowners, farmers, householders or developers who are in difficulties will find members of the West Kent Badger Group able to give advice, provide assistance, or find mutually satisfactory ways of easing these problems.
- See also the West Kent Badger Group's other leaflets.

The West Kent Badger Group produces leaflets on the following topics:

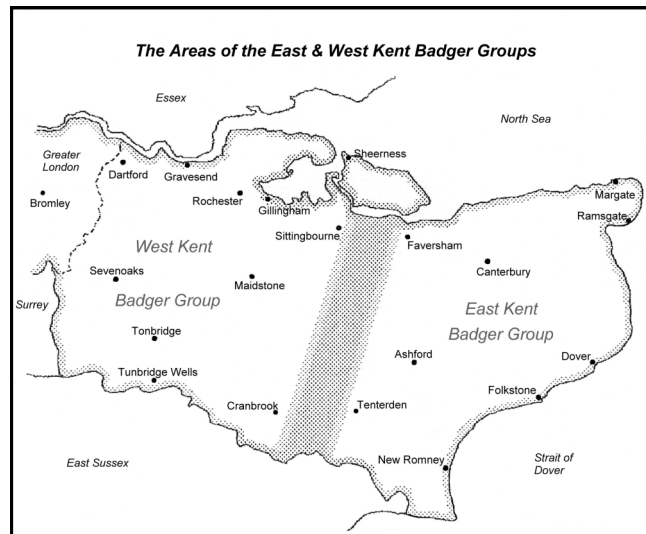
1. *General Information about Badgers*
2. WKBG: Protecting the Badger
3. How to Watch Badgers
4. The Badger's Enemies
5. Badgers in your Garden
6. Badgers and Developments

### USEFUL ADDRESSES

**The Badger Trust** 95 Ditchling Road, Brighton BN1 4ST  
Email: [www.badgertrust.org.uk](http://www.badgertrust.org.uk)

**Folly Wildlife Rescue**, The Broadwater Forest Wildlife Hospital, Fairview Lane, Tunbridge Wells TN3 9LU  
Tel : 01892 543213

**DEFRA (Natural England)**  
Wildlife Management and Licensing, International House, Dover Place, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1HU  
Tel: 0300 060 3900

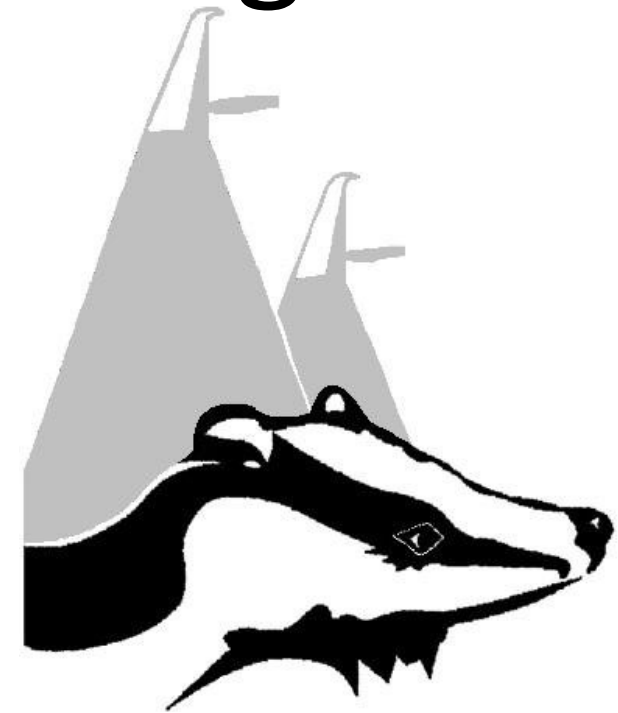


Please use the map to decide which Group you need to contact.

Email: [westkentbadgergroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:westkentbadgergroup@yahoo.co.uk)  
Website: [www.wkbg.org.uk](http://www.wkbg.org.uk)

For the East Kent Badger Group please  
Telephone Martin Newcombe 01233 720229

# General Information about Badgers



A free information leaflet from the  
West Kent Badger Group