

# WKBG: PROTECTING THE BADGER

**W**HY BADGER groups? What's so special about "Brock" that he deserves his own club? There are no badger groups in the rest of Europe - why does Britain need them?

## The badger in Europe

The badger has long served as a readily available and useful commodity for the residents of Europe. Practical uses have been for hair, pelts and medicines; badger products were held to cure a range of ailments including asthma, rheumatism and even impotence if you were prepared to eat its cooked genitals! Less radical usage continues even to this day in some Eastern European countries, where badger flesh and fat are used for meat and lard. Despite its uses, the badger is not especially welcomed; in Denmark it is regarded as a pest and legally hunted. The badger has suffered some persecution in all countries. However, after studying badgers all over the world, Charles Long and Carl Killingley concluded, "Other countries do not appear have such a long-standing record of relentless persecution, involving cruelty in various forms, as does Great Britain".

## Britain's living legacy

You need look no further for proof of this barbaric tradition than an English dictionary:

Verb: badger Definition: to make a badger of, bait like a badger; hence, to subject (one who cannot escape from it) to persistent worry or persecution. [Oxford English Dictionary]

So what happens at a badger dig? The diggers arrive with terriers, spades, metal bars and sometimes even a sack to carry the victim(s) away. Terriers are entered into the sett - the badger is located and the men dig down to expose the animals and let the "fun" of watching the fight begin. A fit badger can get the better of many dogs using its powerful jaws and so for many centuries attempts have been made to even up the fight. The badger's jaws may be broken with a blow from a spade; it may be wounded (not killed) with shotgun pellets or its vulnerable internal organs may be stabbed with a knife. If the badger does not eventually die at the sett, it may be taken away for baiting.

Nearly 150 years of protective legislation

The law is perhaps the most convincing endorsement of the cruelty involved in badger baiting. The first law against baiting badgers was passed in 1850. The badger, in theory, gained further protection through the 1911 Protection of Animals Act and the Cruelty to Animals Act 1935. The 1973 Badgers Act outlawed the killing and taking of badgers by unauthorised persons and the use of badger tongs and low powered ammunition. Then, as now, badger digging was far more prevalent in northern England, particularly so in South and West Yorkshire.

Despite hopes for the 1973 Act The Mammal Society records of West Yorkshire showed that over 62% of setts used by badgers in 1973 had fallen into disuse by 1977. West Yorkshire was designated as the first special Protection Area under the 1973 Act. This prohibited even farmers from killing badgers, except where damage or a risk of spreading disease could be shown. Before then, landowners could legally kill a badger without needing a specific reason.

In 1981, the Wildlife and Countryside Act extended this protection throughout the country. However, when caught, many badger diggers would claim they were only after foxes - the authorities found it difficult to prove illegal intent toward a badger beyond reasonable doubt and court cases often failed. Consequently, a section in the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985 attempted to address this problem; unusually for English Law, the burden of proof was placed on diggers to show that they were not acting against the law, rather than the usual case where the prosecution has to endure the burden of proof. Even so, convictions remained a difficult matter. Even when diggers were found guilty, the penalties imposed appear far from severe; the average fine between 1986 and 1991 was £390, compared to a fine of £253 in 1878.

The Badgers Act 1991 prohibited disturbance to badger setts, except for authorised interference licensed by Natural England. At the same time the Badgers (Further Protection Act) 1991 gave the courts powers to remove the dogs of diggers. A year later, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 consolidated all the previous laws into one piece of legislation.

So how do badger groups help?

The toughest laws in the land would be virtually worthless without the support and activities of organisations such as badger groups. Badger groups maintain detailed and accurate

sett records; essential to prove that an alleged offence took place at an active badger sett, rather than a disused one. Badger group members provide invaluable assistance by keeping a watchful eye for suspicious activities and immediately alerting the Police; training and special equipment allow accurate details to be taken. On no account do members confront badger diggers themselves; those involved have no respect for the law regarding violence towards animals - or humans.

(Adapted from an article by Stephen Jenkinson in Badger News, June 1995, with permission from the Badger Trust)

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**T**HE WEST KENT BADGER GROUP began in 1984 as a group of like-minded people meeting and working under the umbrella of the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation (now Kent Wildlife Trust), when the Trust's H.Q. was in Bower Mount Road, Maidstone. By 1989, there were enough enthusiastic members and potential officers for the Group to become semi-autonomous.

Other Groups had formed in counties throughout Britain, and in 1986 organised themselves into a National Federation of Badger Groups, which now has charitable status and is called the Badger Trust, and to which most Badger Groups are affiliated,

In 1992 Gerry Davis succeeded Tim Pudney as Chairman, and a Constitution for the now self-governing and self-financing Group was adopted. Dick Pettett was Chairman from 1994 until 1999, with Barbara Wilkinson as Vice Chairman; she took over as Chairman in 2000, and was succeeded in 2004 by Murray Elkington. In 2006 Alex Hills became Chairman and, in 2008, a new Constitution created a Board of Trustees and the Group was granted charity status.

Today the group has a strong committee who undertake badger rescue, advise on planning matters, record badger RTA's, maintain records of badger setts undertake education and attend local events. An informative newsletter is produced for our members. Area Contacts cover Local Authority areas, and Local Contacts check in their own vicinity, and report back.

Local Police Forces and the RSPCA have details of the Area Contacts, and Local Councils are also helpful in removing dead

badgers on the roads. The Group has a good working relationship with all these and other wildlife organisations. We also work in conjunction with our immediate neighbouring Groups, East Kent, Sussex and Surrey.

The Group's stated Objectives are: '(i) To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public, and in particular to promote measures that will enhance the conservation of badgers; (ii) To promote the welfare of wildlife, and in particular badgers, for the benefit of the public; and (iii) To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation, and in particular the understanding and study of badgers'. Unfortunately the Group does not generally take parties badger-watching. Its very shyness and nocturnal habits prevent the badger being watched in any numbers, and although individual members may watch badgers, the Group is mainly a conservation organisation, helping and caring for the badger, and giving advice.

#### What you can do

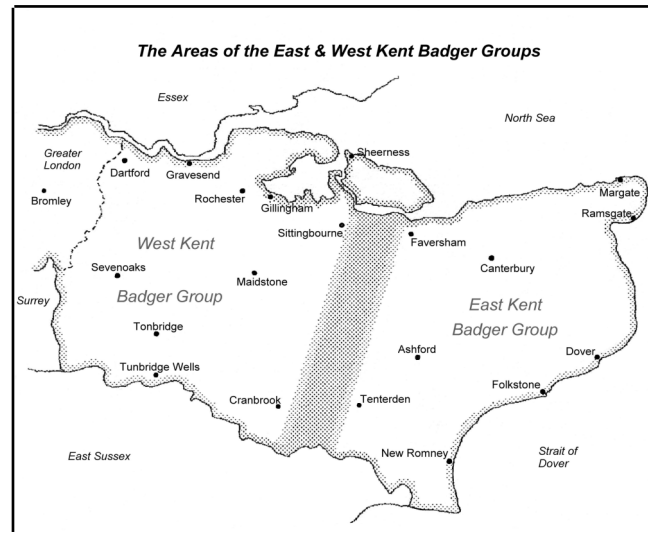
- ◆ Keep an eye on your local setts.
- ◆ Watch for any suspicious activity around a sett, note the colour, make and registration number of any vehicle parked near its location. (Badger diggers are dangerous people, do not challenge them yourself, but phone the Police).
- ◆ Report casualties to the Group.
- ◆ Report injured badgers to the Group, or via the Police.
- ◆ Join the West Kent Badger Group and help protect the badger.

Membership of the Group is vital to its work. Those who support that work by joining and paying an annual subscription are making it possible for us to purchase equipment, pay veterinary fees when necessary, and cover the inevitable administration costs. Those who feel able to help 'in the field' in any way ease the work for those who already do this; and anyone who likes committee work can help by taking some of the onus off other committee members. In whichever way members give their support, all are helping the badgers.

If you would like to know more about the West Kent Badger Group, or to join us in our work for badgers, please contact us.

Email: [westkentbadgergroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:westkentbadgergroup@yahoo.co.uk)

Website: [www.wkbg.org.uk](http://www.wkbg.org.uk)



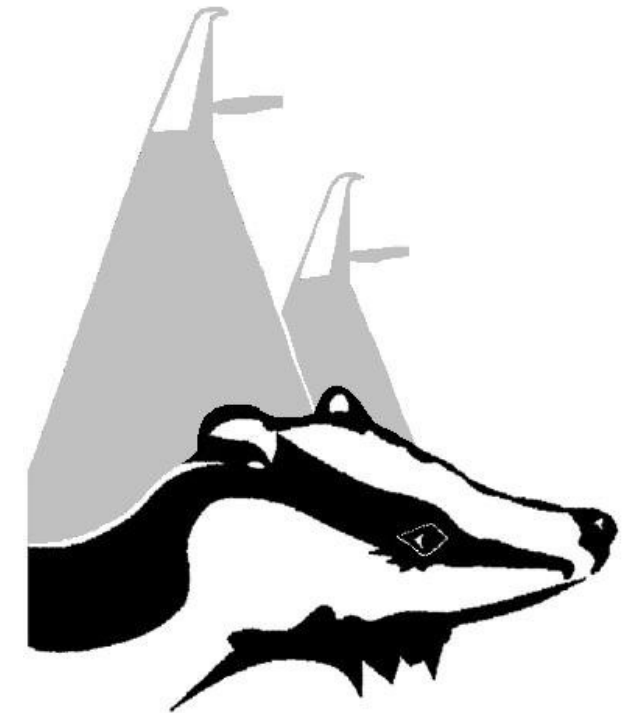
Please use the map to decide which Group you need to contact.

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

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

# West Kent Badger Group: Protecting the Badger



A free information leaflet from the  
West Kent Badger Group