

Brilliant Badgers



Herts & Middlesex
Wildlife Trust

Badger Basics

Badgers (Latin name - *Meles Meles*) is an ancient, iconic native species that has existed for many thousands of years and long before our roads, towns, or cities. Although they have no natural predators, Badgers are generally shy, nocturnal animals which avoid humans and will quickly run away if disturbed.

Our native Badger is more accurately described as the European or Eurasian Badger as it is found throughout most of Europe as well as Western Asia. In the UK, Badgers can be found across England, Wales, Scotland (apart from the far north) and Northern Ireland. They are absent from the Scottish Islands, the Isle of Man, Scilly, and the Channel Islands.

Badgers are part of the family *Mustelidae* (the weasel family) so related to Polecats, Pine Martens, Stoats, Weasels and Otters.



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Where Do They Call Home?

A Badger family or social group, like the one at Tewin Orchard, is called a *clan*. The Tewin Badgers have dug a maze of joined tunnels and chambers to live in. This is called a *sett*. Badger setts are classically found in deciduous woodlands on slopes, and in sandy or chalky soils that drain well. However, like many species in Hertfordshire and Middlesex, Badgers are adapting to more urban and suburban settings.

Generally, there is one main sett for each social group. Sometimes may also be an annex, subsidiary and outlier setts used during the year. Badgers and their setts are protected by law under both the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Badgers spend their days in their underground chambers and emerge to forage at dusk. Although they are nocturnal, they may be seen in daylight, typically late on summer afternoons, or early in the morning when returning home.

Badgers are social animals and live relatively harmoniously within their territories but may scrap amongst themselves to establish a social hierarchy. Usually, they will be seen foraging, feeding, grooming or playing together. Both adult Badgers and their cubs engage in rough-and-tumble games together around their sett.

Badger Senses

Badgers have strong scent glands to mark territories, navigate in the dark and to maintain contact and hierarchy within social groups. A Badger's sense of smell is estimated to be 700-800 times more powerful than ours! With both a powerful sense of smell and excellent hearing for finding food, sensing danger and following well-used paths at night, Badgers are perfectly adapted to a nocturnal lifestyle. Badgers also have a wide range of vocal communication including growls, barks, whinnies, purrs and screams.

Badger paws are adapted for digging setts and feeding among roots and stones. They have five forward-pointing toes with strong claws and powerful leg and shoulder muscles.



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Family Life

Badgers don't hibernate but exhibit *seasonal torpidity* – this means that they are less active in the winter when food is less abundant. However, this is still a busy time for the clan. A sow (female) is able to delay pregnancy, meaning that cubs are all born between January and March. In many clans, only one or possibly two sows will have cubs in any year. It is therefore important for cubs to survive to adulthood or a clan will quickly reduce in population. Females also need stress-free conditions to breed successfully.

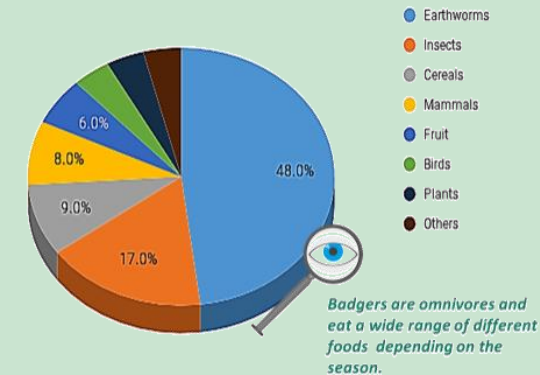
A typical litter has about 2 - 3 cubs, occasionally up to 5. Newborn cubs are tiny, weighing between 75-130g, and keep their eyes closed for about 5 weeks. They remain underground dependent on their mothers until they are 9 or 10 weeks old when, following the sow closely, they begin to venture out in warmer weather.

Badgers keep their setts clean by airing and changing hay or grass bedding to get rid of parasites. Sows gather a good supply to see them through the winter, when there may be cubs to keep warm!

What Do Badgers Eat?

Badgers are opportunistic omnivores, which allows them to adapt to available food and increase their chance of survival. If available, an adult could eat around 200 earthworms every night! When worms are not so plentiful they look for slugs, insects and beetles. Depending on the time of year they might also eat windfall fruit, plant bulbs, nuts, cereals or berries, as well as frogs and small mammals.

Typical Badger Diet by %



Badgers and the Law

Although UK Badgers have no natural enemies, before 1973 they were subjected to a range of cruelty. After much campaigning, Badgers and their setts became protected under law by The Protection of Badgers Act 1992, in addition to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

This means it is illegal to:

- Kill or injure a Badger, dig out or take a Badger away
- Possess a dead Badger or part of one
- Interfere with or disturb a Badger sett
- Cause a dog to enter a Badger sett

Any groundwork near a Badger sett requires a license. It must be carried out carefully to ensure the Badgers are not disturbed. Permission may not be given for work during November to June, when cubs are underground, unless there are exceptional circumstances.



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