

Badger *Meles meles*

STATUS

Common and widespread.

Protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the Badger Acts 1992.



WHAT IS THE BADGER ?

The badger is an instantly recognisable member of the British fauna with a black and white striped head and bulky, grey body. The badger belongs to the *Mustelidae*, a group of mammals possessing musk glands, the secretions of which are used for communication.

Badgers are classed as carnivores but are in fact omnivorous having a varied diet of nuts, berries, cereals, insects, beetles and small mammals as well as its staple diet of earthworms. A variety of habitats are used but preference is given to woodlands surrounded by pasture with well-drained soil essential for the excavation of setts. Badgers are 'principally' nocturnal.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

The badger is distributed throughout the UK but population densities vary considerably. The south west of England contains about a quarter of the total UK population; the densities decrease to the north and east with the Scottish Highlands having a very sparse population. There are gaps in the distribution where suitable habitat exists, which may be due to past or present persecution. In the latter half of the twentieth century there was an increase in the use of urban areas with some large populations developing in areas such as Bristol.

Recent surveys estimate the UK population of badgers at approximately 250,000 adults. The population has gradually increased during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

WHY IS THE BADGER OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Badgers have been persecuted for hundreds of years; by the end of the nineteenth century they were considered rare. Despite increases in population throughout the twentieth century both the range and population densities of badgers have been restricted by persecution.

The UK population is of international importance since the badger is declining over much of its range throughout Europe.

BADGERS IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY IS THE LOCAL BADGER POPULATION?

The Durham County Badger Group maintain records of active badger setts. The current estimate suggests a minimum of 350 setts, which would give a population of between 1000 and 1500 badgers within Durham.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT BADGERS IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The Durham County Badger Group has recorded and monitored setts for the last twenty years, however, no complete survey of the area has been undertaken and so there are gaps in the available data. Records are also kept on badger road casualties, persecution incidents and disturbance of setts.

WHERE HAS THE BADGER BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Badgers are widely, but not evenly, distributed through the Plan area. There are some coastal setts but in east Durham the wooded denes provide the main habitat. Disused quarries in the magnesian limestone quarries are excavated as are areas of old coal mines. Within the wider countryside badger setts are found in deciduous and mixed woodland, hedgerows, scrub, railway embankments and streamsides. There has been a move towards settlement in some urban and suburban areas within Durham.

BADGERS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Habitat destruction – developments on open countryside can result in loss of feeding sites. Foraging areas can radiate out a mile from the sett.

Development of human settlements, including infilling, can cause fragmentation and loss of habitat and thus disruption of the social structure of badger groups.

Road and rail development and use – road traffic is the main cause of badger deaths each year.

Persecution – including badger digging, badger baiting, use of illegal snares and sett stopping.

Misapprehension concerning the current TB status of badgers – there are anecdotal reports of individuals killing badgers in the belief that badgers transmit bovine TB to cattle. The means of transmission of this disease has been widely investigated over many years, and to date the causal link of badgers has not been made. In any event there have been no reported incidences of bovine TB in County Durham badgers.

Changing farming practices – reduction in habitat diversity can cause loss of seasonal food items.

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Ignorance of the law – in relation to use of heavy machinery and disturbance around setts.

BADGERS BENEFIT FROM:

Increased woodland cover – deciduous woodland provides sites for setts as well as providing seasonal food items such as acorns, hazelnuts, beechmast, elderberries and yew berries.

Extensive mixed farming with a mosaic of mixed habitats including permanent pasture.

Protection techniques at vulnerable setts. These might use metal, concrete and modern technology (this should only be attempted where the sett is repeatedly targeted by baiters as the disturbance sometimes causes badgers to desert the sett).

Lack of disturbance of setts.

Vulnerable setts benefit from protection.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE BADGER:

Deciduous and mixed woodland
Farmland
Hedgerows
Quarries

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OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE BADGER:

Brown hare
Pine marten

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N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.
 * indicates action plan produced in 2000.

BADGERS AND THE LAW

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Badgers Act 1992. It is illegal to kill, injure or take any badger. It is illegal to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any part of a sett. A licence is needed from English Nature before any work goes ahead which will cause damage to setts or disturbance to badgers.

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BADGERS IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
<i>Target 1 To extend survey and monitoring scheme to cover the whole of the Plan area.</i>	<i>2010</i>
<i>Target 2 To maintain the existing population of badgers and their habitat.</i>	<i>ONGOING REASSESS EVERY 5 YEARS</i>
<i>Target 3 To raise awareness of the status and habitat requirements of the badger.</i>	<i>ONGOING</i>

BADGER ACTIONS			
ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Lobbying parliament for legislative and policy changes that will benefit the badger, in the context of broad considerations (eg economy).	ONGOING	NFBG	2
2. Appealing against stated cases that would have adverse (and perhaps unintended) consequences for the badger or those seeking to protect it.	ONGOING	NFBG	2
<u>SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION</u>			
3. Develop network of trained volunteers to undertake survey and monitoring.	2002	DCBG	1
4. Seek opportunities to reduce road deaths by use of underpasses and signs.	ONGOING	DCBG, LAs	2, 3
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
5. Promote wildlife friendly management of hedgerows and use of available grant schemes.	2009	CDHP, DCBG	2, 3
6. Reinforce vulnerable setts where location permits.	2009	DCBG, EN, Land owners	2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
7. Extend current survey and monitoring throughout Plan area.	2010	DCBG, DWT	1
8. Encourage recording of sightings and incidents by the general public.	ONGOING	DCBG, DBAP, LAs	1
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
9. Provide advice to Local Authorities on planning applications, which may involve badgers.	ONGOING	EN, DCBG, LAs	2, 3
10. Provide advice to the Forestry Commission and contractors on operations involving badger setts.	ONGOING	EN, DCBG	2, 3
11. Work with landowners and farmers to alleviate perceived conflicts between badgers and farming.	ONGOING	EN, DCBG, FWAG, ABAG, Land owners	2, 3
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
12. Use the Millennium Badger Conference in Durham as a focal point for badger work.	2000	NFBG, DCBG, DBAP	3
13. Increase public understanding of the relationship between badgers and bovine TB.	ONGOING	NFBG, DCBG	3
14. Raise awareness of the continuing threat of persecution.	ONGOING	NFBG, WLOs, DCBG	3