

# Badgers



## Habitat

Badgers live in underground burrows, called sets, in social groups, usually of between 4 and 12 badgers. Each group has a 'territory' varying in size from around 30 hectares where there is plenty of food and 150 hectares in marginal habitat. Badgers communicate mostly by scent. They scent-mark other badgers and pathways in their territory.

## Breeding

Male and female badgers, called 'boars' and 'sows', both reach maturity when they are just over one year old. They usually mate in the spring, with most births in the following February. It takes up to 9 months for the embryo to implant in the womb. Development in the womb (the gestation period) is only 7 weeks. Usually, there are 2 or 3 cubs born in each litter, but single cubs and quadruplets are not uncommon. Less than 50% of cubs survive to adulthood.

## Development

Cubs open their eyes and gain their milk teeth after about 6 weeks. They leave the sett for the first time when they are about 8 weeks old. By 4 months, badgers have a full set of permanent teeth. They can hunt for food and no longer rely on the sow's milk for nourishment.

## Diet

Badgers are omnivorous—they eat both animals and plants—and they are able to choose from a wide range of food, depending on the time of year, weather conditions and local land use. By far the most important item in their diet is earthworms, but other favoured foods include beetles, birds, young rabbits, rodents like squirrels and rats, reptiles and amphibians. Badgers also feed on bee and wasp larvae, fruits, fungi, cereals, nuts, seeds and berries.

## Threats

Adult badgers have no natural predators. The main influences on their survival are competition between themselves and their environment and human activity. Around 50,000 adult badgers are killed each year in road accidents.

## Identification

Their black and white striped head most easily identifies badgers. The silver-grey hair on their body makes them difficult to make out, especially in poor light. They are not very vocal, although they occasionally make sounds ranging from whinnying in pleasure to growling and barking in threat.

Signs of badger activity can be seen more easily than the animal itself. Look for evidence such as heavily worn badger paths with distinctive 5-toed footprints, claw marks on trees, dung pits, mounds of earth outside the entrances to sets, remains of bedding material, and coarse, wiry badger hair.

## Legal Status

The Protection of Badgers Act (1992) makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a badger, or to damage or interfere with a set unless a licence is obtained from a statutory authority. Badgers cannot be set upon by a dog or disturbed in any other way. Badger sets cannot be obstructed or damaged. However, certain exemptions do apply and more information can be found at [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk) or contact the Wildlife Trust or Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

## Chemical Deterrents

There are chemical deterrents available which are approved (under the Control of Pesticides Regulations) for use in deterring animals. They can be obtained from garden centres and Agricultural suppliers, and are normally available in either liquid or aerosol form. These deterrents have a pungent smell, require careful handling and storage, and must only be used strictly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. When placed at badger entry points chemical deterrents may be effective, but the badgers may avoid the treated point and form another. In this case the user has to be equally persistent. Also it is advisable to warn near neighbours when you apply a chemical deterrent as the pungent smell could cause alarm or complaint.

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