



## Badgers

### Ecology

European badgers are nocturnal mammals that can grow up to a metre long and have an average lifespan of around five years.

Badger setts consist of a number of interconnected underground chambers and passageways designated for different purposes, such as for nesting, play or safety when in danger. Setts are lined with bedding, which usually consists of grass, straw or leaves, and this is replaced regularly with fresh material. Setts are passed on between generations, with some setts known to have existed for over a hundred years. Badgers are social animals; a typical clan consists of about six adult badgers, however this can rise to over twenty.

Although technically carnivores, badgers are actually opportunistic omnivores and will eat a wide range of foods depending on what is available, including insects, carrion, small mammals, fruit and cereals. However, their most important food source is earthworms, and they can eat as many as 200 a night.

Badgers mate throughout the year; however, following breeding, females delay pregnancy so that their cubs are born in the first three months of the year. Litters usually contain two to three cubs, initially blind and hairless. Mothers suckle the cubs for about twelve weeks although, by this age, the cubs are already exploring their surroundings outside the sett.

### Habitat and distribution

Badgers are found all over the UK. They often favour habitats such as woodlands or hedgerows, with sloping ground and well-drained or sandy soils in which they can easily dig setts.

### Why are badgers protected?

Heavy persecution of badgers in the 19th century caused numbers to drop dramatically; by the end of the 19th century, badgers were considered rare. Legislation that protects badgers came into force in the 1970s, which has helped their numbers to recover. The main threats facing badgers today are road traffic collisions, illegal persecution (such as badger baiting), and the highly controversial badger cull.

### The law

European badgers and their setts are protected under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992. They are also included on Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and Appendix III of the Bern Convention. The legislation affords badgers protection against deliberate harm or injury making it an offence to:

- Wilfully kill, injure, take, possess, or cruelly ill-treat a badger
- To interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it
- To obstruct access to, or entrance of, a badger sett
- To disturb a badger whilst it is occupying a sett

Penalties for offences include fines of up to £5000, plus up to six months imprisonment, for each offence committed.



Local Planning Authorities will often ask for a badger survey to be undertaken as part of planning if the proposed development has the potential to impact on badgers or their habitats. It should be noted that developments that are not subject to planning permission are still subject to the above legislation.