

Badger

Meles meles (Linnaeus, 1785)

Order: carnivora

The large heavily set badger is most often seen dead by the side of the road. The badger is a member of the weasel family and its black and white striped head and thick grey coat make it easy to identify. Males (boars) are larger than females (sows) and may be up to 90 cm long and weigh about 12 kg. although badgers have been recorded weighing up to 27.3 Kg. They have short powerful legs with well developed claws on each foot which they use in excavating their tunnels, or setts, and in searching for food. Badgers live in family groups (or clans) of 2-20 which spend most of the day in extensive networks of tunnels and chambers excavated in dry banks and slopes which may be used for many generations. The female badgers collect bracken and grass as bedding and often the discarded material can be seen outside the entrance to the sett. At dusk the badgers emerge cautiously from their sett and groom themselves before setting off to look for food over regularly used tracks. Clans occupy territories of 30-150 Ha, often marked with their loose droppings in shallow dung pits. Waiting for emergence from the sett is the best time to see badgers in the wild although they are very timid and have excellent hearing and sense of smell, their vision is relatively poor.



Photograph: Dave Chapman



Badger left hind paw print (5 x 4 cm)



Typical Badger dropping. size varies—often in shallow pits

Generally only a single female (sow) in each group will breed each year, giving birth to up to 5 cubs. Mating generally occurs between February and May but cubs are born in January or February as the badger exhibits delayed implantation of the fertilised egg. The cubs are blind and dependent on the mother for 5-6 weeks and emerge from the sett in April or May. The cubs are weaned at 3 months and females mature at 12-15 months, males at 2 years, although 2/3rds of cubs die in their first year. Badgers may live up to 19 years, although 3-6 years is more usual.

Badgers are most frequently found in deciduous woodland but they may also dig setts in large gardens or along railway embankments. Their territories may encompass areas of pasture and arable fields. Setts are normally built in light or sandy soil, rather than clay. Badgers eat mainly earthworms which they locate by snuffling in turf, often leaving distinctive holes in fields and lawns. They also eat insects, fruit, roots and cereals, especially fodder maize, and occasionally small mammals including mice, hedgehogs and rabbits. Badgers seem to be very fond of wasp and bee nests which they will dig out of banks in search of the grubs.

Badgers have no natural predators and most deaths are the result of interaction with humans or with other badgers. Road casualties are a major cause of death, estimated at about 20% of the population each year, as badgers seem to take little notice of traffic on their nightly rounds. Legal and illegal killing of badgers has resulted from their possible association with the spread of bovine tuberculosis, this is especially significant where high densities of badgers coincide with beef and dairy farming in areas such as the South West. In some areas badgers are caught and used in illegal fights with dogs.

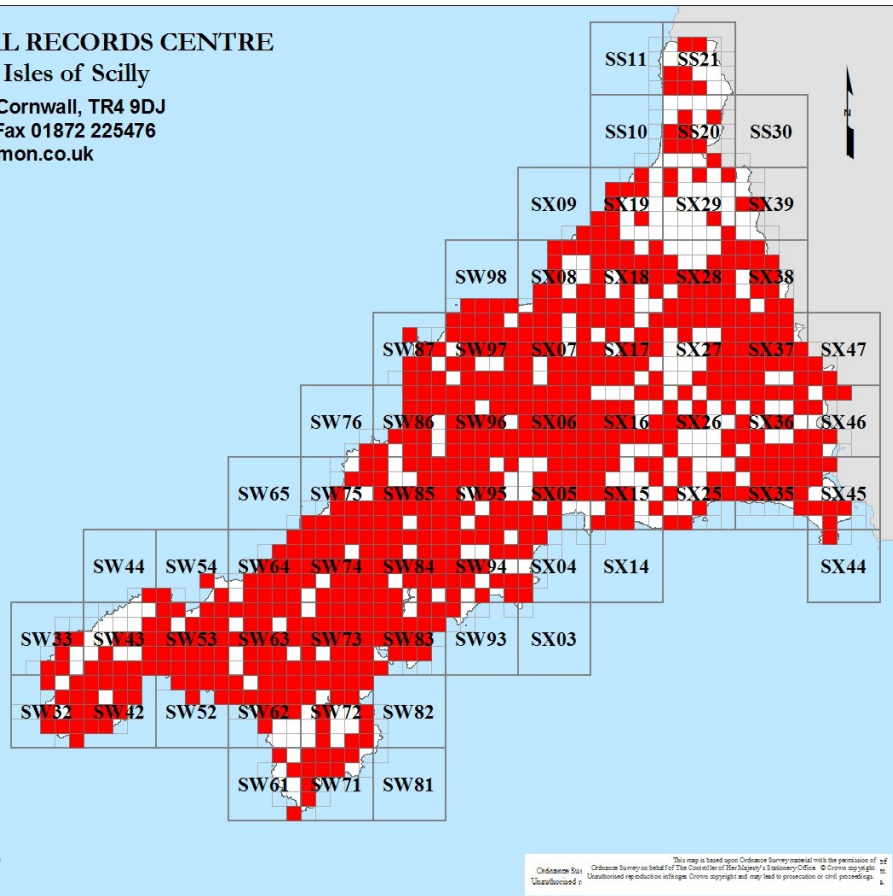


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Cornwall Mammal Group
Badger
Meles meles
As of September 2009

Legend

- Grid 10 Km
- Grid 2 Km (Tetrad)
- Badger records, 2000-2009



Local distribution and key sites

Found across the UK, the badger is most common in the South West. It is the third most recorded mammal species in Cornwall. The Badger is widespread and common, localised gaps due to lack of recorder effort?

Number of records per date class

2002 to 2006 inclusive 1671

1997 to 2001 inclusive 385

All records previous to 1997 983

Total 3039

The badger occurs across Europe to Asia, except northern Scandinavia and the Mediterranean islands.

Common. Under the Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 it is an offence to kill, injure or take a badger, or disturb a sett without a licence from Natural England. There are estimated to be 250,000 to 300,000 badgers in Britain

Survey Methods

Road casualties

Targeted sett surveys

Cull returns

Field signs – prints, dung pits, setts and fur caught on wire.

Did you know?

Also known as brock, broc, bawson or baget. Ginger, or erythristic, badgers as well as albinos occur. Elder trees are often found near to setts as they flourish in the disturbed and fertilised ground and the badgers eat the fruit and pass the seeds in their dung. Badger fur was used for shaving brushes as it was believed that they did not suffer from anthrax. Dachshunds were originally developed to hunt badgers in their setts. The prohibition of badger baiting in 1835 was one of the first examples of wildlife conservation legislation in the UK

Key references

Clark, M. (2007) Badgers. Whittet Books, London

Delahay, R. et al (2008) in Harris, S. and Yalden, D.W. (Eds.) Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook, 4th Ed. The Mammal Society.