

OBG

NEWSLETTER

May 2016

Development—the hidden badger cull

Julie Hammett, OBG Chair

Over the past two years we have started to witness major changes in planning that seriously impact on badgers and wildlife. Developers rule ! Planning officers and ecologists openly say that environmental issues carry almost no weight in decision making. Ecological assessments produced on behalf of developers are all too often inaccurate and underplay the presence of badgers and other protected or endangered species. We fear our development case load is going to grow rapidly.

I'd like to thank everyone who objected to the recent Cumnor Hill application. We have been fighting to protect the badgers main sett here for a decade. They have been moved several times and now have almost nowhere left to go. We were called out to an incident in a village nr Witney and were able to halt developers from completely destroying the setts on site. Sadly 'pre-emptive' destruction of environments seems to be a common developer tactic. We hate to see a scorched earth policy called 'a little bit of gardening or housekeeping' when the aim is to avoid being forced to take costly or time consuming mitigation measures.

It is vital we mobilise to map setts and we must prioritise green field areas known to be under threat of development. The scale of development is so large that badgers living near any town, village or hamlet are at risk. Badgers often successfully colonise brownfield sites and these will have reduced protection under new fast track planning laws. In addition to the field work of mapping setts we need everyone to be vigilant for planning applications and to help build and submit objections when needed.



NATIONAL BADGER WEEK EVENT

Join us in Badgerland

An evening of talks and badger watching
at The Saw Mill
Wytham Woods, Oxford OX2 8QQ

30th June at 6.30pm
Please feel free to bring a picnic at 6pm

SPECIAL GUESTS

Patrick Barkham, Author and Journalist
Dominic Dyer, Badger Trust CEO
Nigel Fisher, Conservator, Wytham
- Badgers not guaranteed -

Suggested donation £6 per person
Please secure your place in advance as
numbers are limited.

Register online
<http://www.oxonbadgergroup.org.uk/>
Or email: obg@oxonbadgergroup.org.uk



Come to Stafford with
OBG & end Badger
Week in style

Sett records report

Barbara Witkowski

Oxfordshire Badger Group was inspired by National Badger Day 2015 to ask Oxfordshire residents to tell us about their local setts. By informing Oxfordshire Badger Group of a sett, you increase the chances to protect it from damage or destruction. Oxfordshire Badger Group has been collecting records of setts throughout Oxfordshire for over 40 years and to date we have more than 970 setts listed. We have learned of 15 additional setts since October 2015.

Our sett records are confidential but we do offer a professional service to share limited information with appropriate organisations in order to prevent risk to setts due to development or building on a location. Since August 2015, we have received and responded to seven requests for our professional services. Our involvement helps to mitigate against disruption to badgers, their setts and their habitats. This has in turn afforded us with information about proposed developments within Oxfordshire together with donations that support our work.

Injured or dead badgers

We also keep records of sightings or live, injured and dead badgers in the county. Badgers are protected under law and suspicious deaths should be reported to the Oxfordshire Badger Group swiftly as they will be investigated.

Over 50 dead badgers have been reported to us since March 2015, many on the same roads over the course of the year. This figure is 25% higher than in the previous year, which may be indicative of a rise in deaths, or a rise in the whole population, but another more positive factor is the additional diligent work that our members have done this year in keeping us informed and increasing our records.

Membership 2016

Linda Ward

OBG relies on membership fees and donations to continue our work for badgers across Oxfordshire. We ask supporters and all active member to pay an annual fee at £7.50 per household. Joining OBG is separate from joining the Badger Trust (and vice versa). OBG sends £2 of each fee to the Badger Trust.

Fees have not increased since 2006 despite increases in post and insurance costs. These are partly offset by the generous annual donations that so many of you kindly make. We also raise income via sett record reports and through charity stalls at a number of events. Savings have also been made by the use of email and the internet to minimise postal costs. Those of you who can follow us by email or via the website will have frequent communications. There is the option to 'opt out' of postal messages. If you decide to 'stay postal' you can still play an active part if you are happy to be contacted by phone. Membership runs for a calendar year (Jan-Dec) and you will be asked to renew for a further 12 months during December.

Why be part of OBG ?

Put simply, your membership will help us to help badgers. We aim to produce 1-2 newsletters a year and hold a lecture or field based event annually. This year members have a priority invitation to our National Badger Week event at Wytham on 30th June. If you are able to play an active role - great— Oxfordshire's badgers need you !

Clems' legacy

Dave Williams of the Badger Trust recently handed OBG a great treasure. The folder contained a set of green OS Pathfinder maps (1:25,000) covering Oxfordshire. These were meticulously marked up with Badger setts and came with detailed sett records.

These came from the estate of the late Ed Clements—"Clem" . I learned that he was a geologist / geographer by training who used his knowledge to identify the most likely sites for badger setts. He spent his life walking to countryside and mapping setts. He had little interest in watching the badgers. The gift of the maps was timely as there is a pressing need to repeat his work. If anyone has memories of his visits to Oxfordshire please



Are there any badgers round here?

If you're in Oxfordshire the answer is likely to be yes, but how can you tell if you're walking where badgers walk? Here are a few things to look out for:



Setts.

The entrances to badger's homes are much bigger than rabbit burrows, less smelly than a fox's den and tend to have big spoil heaps outside, with discarded foliage from spring-cleaning.



Snuffle holes

A badger will search out worms and leather-jacket grubs hidden in grass and leave tell-tale circular holes



Hair

Strands of easily identifiable coarse black and white hair will often get caught on twigs, foliage and here some barbed wire that crossed the badger's route



Trail Cameras

To be sure whether there are badgers around, put out a trail camera and see what turns up. My front garden path isn't the most likely badger route, but the camera revealed what goes on when I'm asleep less than 10 metres away! We may be able to loan a trail camera to members – please ask if this is of interest.



Tracks

Badgers are creatures of habit and consistently use the same routes so that the vegetation is soon compressed:



Latrines

There is debate about the significance in badger society of the latrine, but evidence shows that badgers use specific sites to relieve themselves. This site was in the middle of my front lawn.

Barbara Witkowski

Preparing for a Badger cull in Oxfordshire

With the government set to expand the badger cull new areas in the coming months and years Oxfordshire needs to be prepared to face a cull here in our own county. However it is not just the cull that threatens badgers as we know, persecution and development affects them probably even more. To prepare for a cull the most important issues are sett mapping and surveying your local area. Getting to know where your local setts are and reporting them to us here at OBG is vitally important. We need a detailed comprehensive database of our Oxfordshire badgers to have any chance of saving them. While sett surveying it is also very important to make a note of and report blocked footpaths. To legally oppose the cull these footpaths need to be open and accessible for wounded badger patrols which would need to be set up. By doing this and keeping an eye on our local setts, like many of us already do, will help protect badgers from persecution as well as getting prepared for the future.



Emily Lawrence

OBG can only protect badgers if we know where they are

In the last three years I have been involved in patrolling the Gloucestershire cull zone as an individual, part of an autonomous group and as a wounded badger patrol member. Wounded badger patrols are extremely effective,



usually a high viz jacket is worn and footpaths walked, checking for injured and shot badgers. Shooters should not be able to operate if a wounded badger patrol is in the area. Many shooters packed up in Gloucestershire on the arrival of a wounded badger patrol. This is usually done at night time but daytime checks are also vital. During daytime walks new setts were found, known setts checked to see whether active or not, cages found and any signs of shootings i.e. blood stains. Not everyone feels comfortable going out at night time in the dark so many are more comfortable with the daytime walks. I would say though, night time patrols are not as scary as you may

think, being in a group of friendly dedicated wildlife protectors makes you feel safe.

Sign Emily's petition

Nearly 7,000 signatures, [add yours.](#)

<https://petition.parliament.uk/>

Resources



New Badger Action Network site funded by Network for Animals is live at <http://badgeractionnetwork.org.uk>

Winchcombe Wildlife Walk & Vigil

Please join us in the heart of the North Cotswolds cull zone to commemorate all the badgers already killed as well as those about to be shot across the country as the badger cull rolls out.

Thursday 27th May 2016

Meet at 7.30pm in Back Lane Car Park GL54 5PZ
A peaceful walk in and around Winchcombe followed by a silent vigil opposite Abbey Terrace at 8.45pm

The walk is gentle and takes about an hour but there is an option to drop out half way round. WBP high viz, badger masks and anything badgery would be very welcome



info@oxonbadgershooting.org

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Sett and RTA reports: Settrecords.oxonbadgergroup@gmail.com

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WWW: Oxonbadgergroup.org.uk

A changing of the guard and the fight continues

Badger Trust AGM Report

16th April in Adlington Hall, Macclesfield.



As a new Badger Group Secretary I was interested to go to the AGM and see how the Badger Trust works and meet other Groups. The day started badly as the M42 was shut and as we took the diversion over to the M1 it started to snow! We persevered like all good badger people do in adversity and thankfully the further north we travelled the better the weather.

We arrived only slightly late to find the magnificent meeting room full. It soon became clear that this was no ordinary 'run of the mill' AGM. The Chair, Peter Martin presented two draft resolutions proposed by himself and Dave Williams under 'General business'. These provoked fierce interest and debate. Both motions were to radically change the composition and appointment of Trustees to the governing Board. The key changes are:

1. Six members of the board will be recruited to give good countrywide coverage. The country will be divided into 6 'geographical regions' of which one will be Wales. The Trust will appoint at least one Trustee from the Badger Groups within each Region. The aim is to improve direct contact between the board and the Groups. They are allowing 6 months to recruit to these posts. If anyone from OBG is interested in standing .. Let us know
2. The other six members of the board can be anyone the Board decides has relevant skills and experience
3. No Group can have more than one member on the Board at the same time; married couples cannot serve at the same time and long term (>12years) service should be avoided.

Other Governance changes include the appointment of external auditors to ensure financial transparency.

The measures provoked quite deep divisions with a split between those who seemed to feel that the work and contribution made by long standing Board members was not valued and those who felt a change of guard was long overdue.

Dominic Dyer and Peter Martin made it very clear that this was not meant to be any criticism of past leadership or actions. The Charity Commission is quite capable of penalising The Badger Trust if fails to comply with Charity Law and best practice guidelines. The Trust has to be bullet proof to fight current DEFRA Culling policy and oppose powerful groups like the NFU and Countryside Alliance. Secondly, a more diverse Board should have better representation of Group interests, including a recognition that the Trust needs to tackle the threat of development and the role of the Trust in education might improve. The AGM needed to reach the right decision and on the day both motions were carried with a strong majority including OGB's vote.

Our previous Chair, Simon Boulter has now rotated off the Badger Trust Board.

OBG thanks him for representing us during his term in office.

CEO report—Dominic Dyer

The many achievements of the Badger Trust—working with Team Badger during 2016 would fill this newsletter.

I leave you with one quote, then we'll have an excellent lunch and move onto the afternoon session (over the page).

Linda Ward

“Badgers have become a lightning rod for the protection of the environment. This is the largest wildlife effort in Europe”

Working together with the Badger Trust

The AGM spent the afternoon brainstorming the 'Head Office' working relationship with the Groups. This session was hugely informative and wide ranging. We learned a great deal about the activities and challenges of both.

So many positive resolutions and work themes were identified that I began to feel sorry for the Trusts' tiny paid staff. Its clear that the Groups will have to pull their weight and for tasks to be shared. The main outcomes were that the Trust will coordinate or provide leadership in these areas:

- ⇒ Public, media and 'political' presence
- ⇒ Growing membership and encouraging active participation in local groups
- ⇒ Provision of written 'best practice protocols on all areas of 'badger ' management—these to include templates for new member packs, how to handle situations in the field, biosecurity measures
- ⇒ Production of a 'badger ' app including tools for reporting setts, incidents, RTAs 'on the spot'
- ⇒ An online private forum for badger groups & trust to interact
- ⇒ Training materials and tools to help Groups encourage and grow a youth base
- ⇒ Advice of standard membership & fees for services such as sett record searches
- ⇒ Access to professional back up and advice when needed (for example ecological, legal or written Badger Trust support)

The fruits of this are already starting to appear on the Trusts website. In addition OBG has already teamed up with neighbouring Groups via the West Midlands Forum.

Wildlife Crime Officers

Ian Hutchinson retired from the Badger Trust at the AGM. He is being replaced by two people.

Andy Swinborn and Craig will cover investigating persecution and incidents but also be available to come out and provide training in sett recording. OBG expects to be first in the queue.

Linda Ward

OBG Events 2016

Badger events to suit everyone

Please volunteer to help or come support us on the day.

[4th June Oxford Wild Fare—OBG Stand—
Natural History Museum](#)

[8th June Badgers vs Hedghogs —
\(BBOWT\)
8pm Waterstones Oxford](#)

[18 June: Wildlife Festival,
Birmingham](#)

25 June—OBG is at LUSH-Oxford

30th June—OBG Wytham event

2nd July—Stafford Badger Festival,
Market Square

16 July—Cheltenham Badger March,
Noon Montpellier Gardens

OBG AGM—to be confirmed

[04 Sept: Wychwood Forest Fair
Conrbury Park](#)

4-6 Nov: Badger Trust Annual Conference , Hertfordshire

OBG will be at the Green Fair in Oxford for Xmas

Details & current information will be on our website

Oxfordshire Wildlife Crime

Andy Thompson— Local Policing Inspector

W. Oxon: PC 3009 Kenneth Cook

Vale: PC 4650 Darren James

S. Oxon: PC 4843 Robert Searle

Cherwell: TBC

Fname.Surname@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk