



WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP



NEWSLETTER 74 APRIL 2016

Brighton demo Badger rescues
Badger workshop Bait marking study News and reports

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

www.wsbg.co.uk

Registered Charity No 1100142

Patron David Shepherd OBE



MEMBER OF THE BADGER TRUST



THE MAMMAL SOCIETY



AND SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST

COVER PICTURE

by Pat Williams

**Notice is hereby given that the
Annual General Meeting of the**

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

**will take place on
Tuesday 24th May 2016
at 7.30pm
in Wanborough Hall**

A G E N D A

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) Presentation and acceptance of 2015 AGM minutes
- 3) Chairman's report
- 4) Field Officer's report
- 5) Presentation of accounts and Treasurer's report
- 6) Appointment of Auditors
- 7) Notices of Motions
- 8) Election of Committee. Nigel Mee and Rodger Munt will be standing down. Dave Williams and Sue Garden will be standing down as per the constitution. These two and the other Committee members are willing to stand again. New Committee members are needed
- 8) Any other business

Our guest speaker is Peter Martin, Chairman of Badger Trust, who will tell us of his plans and hopes for the organisation.

Please note the earlier starting time as our short AGM will be followed by Peter's talk, then refreshments, quizzes and a raffle.

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Martin D'Arcy

Winter is over and the first gentle sun of spring is shyly peeping round the clouds. After a very wet winter we await with interest the new season to see what weather it brings. The mildness of the winter has meant that many flowers have appeared unusually early. I saw a violet in January and primroses before Christmas. Such vagaries of climate can impact on our wildlife. Some species are negatively affected, while others may do well.

What effect this disruption of the normal pattern will have on our badgers remains to be seen. What seems certain is that the government will continue with its failed strategy of culling badgers and may even extend the number of areas where killing will take place. In response, WSBG members joined a protest march in Brighton at the end of February (report on centre pages).

There are more marches planned and I hope many of you will be able to join us in making our feelings known and generating publicity for our cause. It is important to try to keep reminding the general public that this is a controversial policy with little scientific backing and that there are effective alternatives which do not involve killing.

Nigel

Our long-serving and long-suffering treasurer, Nigel Mee, is standing down at the AGM in May. He has been a

reliable, committed, enthusiastic and resourceful member of the committee who has contributed a great deal to the group over the years. In addition to his vital work on balancing our books and keeping everything in good financial order, he has been involved in numerous projects and has worked at the "sett face" with badger release, rehabilitation, monitoring and conflict resolution. He has worn the white helmet of a field officer with distinction. We very much appreciate his work and support, and are very sorry to lose him.

Nigel's "retirement" means that there is a vacancy at the heart of West Surrey Badger Group. We urgently need a new treasurer. We are required by the Charity Commission to have a treasurer and so cannot carry on without one. We need your help in filling this crucial role. If you know of anybody who might be interested in helping a worthwhile animal charity with a warm and engaging ~~chairman~~ committee, and a good provision of tea, cakes and biscuits, please, do let us know.

Referendum

Finally, as you are all too aware, there is a referendum due in June to decide whether we remain in, or leave the EU. It is not my place, or intention, to tell you how to vote. What is important is to think about the impact the decision could have on our wildlife and the habitats they depend on. You might want to ask representatives of the

two sides some questions on how the decision will affect the environment.

Some of our most important and influential legislation on environmental protection comes from the EU, in the shape of a number of Directives that have become enshrined in UK law. For example the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive which led to the protection of important areas such as the Thames Basin Heaths, e.g Chobham, Whitmoor and Horsell Commons. (Page 14 reveals a new project to protect our local heathland birds.)

TREASURER'S REPORT

Nigel Mee

Well, the current financial year 2014-15 comes to an end, and in yet another busy year for the charity its finances have been remarkably consistent with previous years. Overall the financial state of WSBG remains very strong.

Income will be just over £7.5k compared to last year's £6k. Subscriptions, donations and data search fees remain consistent as the largest forms of income. The increase of £1.5k is due both to having a sponsored walk this year and a single generous donation.

The walk in October held on the weekend of the old Badger Day was attended by a small group who between them raised a magnificent £819.50. The charity will be able to raise a little more through gift aid so the total donated by WSBG to the Badger Trust will be £1k. Well done to each and every dedicated walker!

In 2015 topping work was necessary on some of the tallest trees at Ruxley on land owned by the group. The owners of the property most immediately affected kindly

Because the environment is shared, and wildlife does not recognise borders, effective protection has to be international. We share one planet and we need to work together to maintain it. Whatever the decision, we will need to continue to negotiate, compromise and cooperate with our neighbours for the benefit of our wildlife, and all of us.

Thanks for your continuing support which enables us to keep caring for local badgers, who need your help perhaps more than ever.

offered to pay a half of the £1.8k cost which was received as a donation. We remain most grateful for this neighbourly approach.

Costs for 2014-15 will be just over £9k compared to a similar figure last year. Over £2k has needed to be spent at Ruxley on surveying and tree work. The group has been continuing to invest in equipment for field work, specifically night cameras for studying setts.

So whilst there will be a small deficit in the financial year it can be funded from the charity's strong cash reserves, which currently stand at £52k.

The dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly for this little charity and do so much for badgers in West Surrey, the faithful members who each year pay their subscriptions and support the events, the volunteer helpers behind the scenes – all can rest assured the group remains in good financial shape for the immediate future. My thanks go to you all for helping West Surrey Badger Group continue to do its good works.

I was phoned at 8am one day just as I was getting out of bed. A distraught lady said she had found an injured badger in a field, and did not know what to do. Her neighbour suggested getting the farmer to shoot it to save it further pain, but the lady's daughter thought it worth trying to save the badger. I got directions and set off as soon as I could.

At that time of the morning, the traffic in and around Guildford is terrible, so it took me quite a time to arrive at the meeting point. We then had to walk across a very large field to the badger. Fortunately it had been covered with a towel and it had not moved from where it was first spotted: not a good sign. I lifted the towel, but the badger did not respond. I could see red raw wounds just above its tail, typical badger rump wounds from fighting, probably a young boar being chased off by mother as she now had cubs to feed.

Luckily the lady helped with carrying the cage all the way across the field and back to my car.

The journey to Wildlife Aid was very slow, having to get through Guildford and Cobham. The vet and team were ready for my arrival, and we quickly moved the cage into the surgery. The wound looked clean, and did not seem very deep. But there was concern about the very poor responses from the badger. After some pain-killing and healing injections, he was placed in a pen with bedding, food, water and a heat lamp.

Unfortunately he died overnight, probably with blood poisoning from the wound. At least he had not lain there in the field, probably in pain, where he could have been attacked by dogs.

Dave Williams

We received a request to help a badger behaving oddly. He had been in a garden above ground for two days, often sheltering behind the garden shed. There were no obvious signs of physical injury, but given the proximity to a busy road there was always the possibility of it being a minor RTA resulting in a bit of concussion. There were some old territorial fighting wounds on his rump but these had healed. I caught him and took him to Wildlife Aid for assessment, giving me a day or two to sort out a release plan.

The usual advice when rehabilitating a badger back to the wild is to return it



Two badger rescues

to the point where it was found. But that would not be very sensible here, since the badger was picked up from a garden where the only entry point was through the gateway onto the main road, just 50 metres from a level crossing. So a little pre-release investigation work was required, meaning a quick stroll around the area and a best guess made for a place to launch the badger.

I discovered ample signs of badger activity (snuffle marks, paths and fence push-under) but chose a release spot 200 metres away from the garden, on a footpath running alongside the railway line. There was a fence push-under and a single badger sett entrance on the railway embankment.

Next evening after dark I brought the badger to a position close to the fence push-under, giving him the opportunity to go through onto the embankment or to continue along the footpath. I opened the cage door. Badger shot straight out, through the fence, up to the entrance hole and disappeared down into it without even a thank you.

Peter Eggleton

PLANNING REPORT

Dave Williams

Camberley

We objected to a development in Upper Chobham Road, Camberley as we felt that the survey was inadequate, and had failed to determine if badgers were present on the site.

The consultant had started with the premise that 'there were no badgers in the area as the habitat was not suitable, and badgers were hampered by garden fences and roads'. We know that Camberley has plenty of badgers and that garden fences are no barrier for them.

The application was refused for several reasons, including our objection about the validity of the survey. I am sure they will be back again, and this time they should do a proper survey.

Farnham

We also objected to a development in Crondall Lane, Farnham. The house will be only 10 metres from an active sett, with the tunnels and chambers right beneath one of the houses. The consultant had recommended that more survey work be done and a mitigation plan proposed before planning permission was granted. Waverley Borough Council ignored this and

our letter of objection, and outline planning permission was granted.

We are asking Waverley for a meeting and an explanation. Unfortunately, although we requested assistance from Surrey Wildlife Trust to support our request, they did not support us, which was very disappointing.

Windlesham

The application for a large housing development in Heathpark Woods in Windlesham has been refused. Among the reasons are the fact that a large badger sett exists there and not enough provision has been made to protect it. I am sure they will lodge an appeal.

In a statement from the developer, a spokesperson commented that the badgers would be better off and have better habitat after the development. I don't think the badgers would agree.

Deepcut

Rodger has worked very hard on the Deepcut and Princess Royal housing developments, and has had meetings and site visits with the developers, so we are hoping that the setts can be saved on the sites. Rodger will give an update in the next newsletter.

Foxhunting a thing
of the past?
Don't you believe
it. Turn to page 12



www.historic-uk.com

BAIT MARKING STUDY

Peter Eggleton

Almost three years ago WSBG assisted the RSPCA with the release of five radio collared badgers as part of a study to evaluate the success of orphaned cub rehabilitation (in this case a mature orphan group). As reported in our newsletter, we were extensively involved in the tracking of these badgers in the months after the release, recording how they explored the area, how they discovered the existing setts and eventually settled down in a dispersed pattern in different setts. We know from trail camera work and chip-reading studies last year that at least one of the females has produced cubs.

The original badgers, if they are still surviving, will now be four years old and possible grandparents. It would be interesting to review the activity in the area and attempt to see if firm boundaries have been established between the dispersed badgers or if they are interacting more like an extended family. To do this we will complete a bait marking study. We have



Dave Williams

already found there is current use by badgers at six of the setts. We have already found 12 dung pit areas. We will need to make up six different baits of peanuts, treacle

and a handful of small coloured inert plastic chippings. For five consecutive evenings we will put bait down outside each sett (a different colour for each sett). After a couple of days we will inspect the dung pits to see which colours have turned up where.

We hope to give you the results in the next newsletter.



Jan Reen



Brighton Badger Army March

Dave Williams

ON SATURDAY 27 FEBRUARY the first Badger Army March of 2016 took place in Brighton. This is a gathering to protest against the unjust badger culling programme that this government is determined to go ahead with, despite the overwhelming evidence against badger culling to reduce bovine TB in cattle.

This was the first march since the government announced that, not only would they be continuing the so called pilot trials in Dorset, Somerset and Gloucestershire, but they would extend the cull to many other counties where TB is a major problem in cattle. We had a good attendance, with 12 WSBG members among the 150 or so attending. It began with a few speeches explaining why the cull was so wrong, with all the scientific evidence against it.

The biggest problem for farmers is the precision of the current TB test, only at best 80% accurate. This means that a minimum of 20% of cattle are incorrectly diagnosed, some with TB that are missed and some without TB taken for slaughter.



Vanessa and Dave

Speakers were John Cooper QC from the Save Me Trust, Mark Jones from the Born Free Foundation, Dominic Dyer from the Badger Trust, and Sarah Geller from Gloucestershire, an active campaigner who helps on night patrols. We heard how DEFRA not only want to extend the culling areas, but make it easier for farmers by extending the time, reducing



Sue and Sue

the area, and lowering the targets for the number of badgers to be killed. These actions are totally against advice from leading scientists.

We marched peacefully through the town, and stopped on the sea front for more speeches. Unfortunately there was a bitter wind which was too much for some, so our numbers were reduced. However



Martin and Julia

it didn't rain, and it was nice to mix with like-minded people from other parts of the country.

The march was reported on BBC South, but didn't make the national papers or TV.



BADGER WORKSHOP

Alex Learmont

WSBG workshops are designed to give participants an introduction into the ecology and behaviour of badgers and also some of the issues they face both in Surrey and nationally. The workshops also have a practical side where we get out into the countryside to visit a sett and talk about how to spot signs left by badgers in the field.

This March we had a good turnout with over 10 people attending the workshop. The day started with an excellent presentation from Dave which covered everything from what badgers eat to development issues affecting setts. This is a great all-round introduction to these lovely animals and is always fascinating to hear.

After a tea and biscuit break we moved on to a talk from Peter about some of the rescues conducted by West Surrey Badger Group. When badgers are seriously injured or trapped it is sometimes necessary to rescue them and either take them to a wildlife hospital or to release them somewhere safe. WSBG rescued over 10 badgers in 2015 and the team are anticipating more this year.

Peter showed us how to use graspers and cages to safely secure badgers and also shared some of his experiences with rescues and other badger call outs. He then described how setts are mapped and recorded, encouraging everyone to complete sett surveys.



Following our classroom session we headed out to view a local sett. Luckily the weather was on our side as we made our way across a field and into a beautiful patch of woodland near Compton. Straight away the team started putting our field skills to practice and picking up signs of badgers. Scrapes, snuffle holes and paths under fences indicated that the badgers weren't too far away.

As soon as we stepped into the trees we found a number of entrances dug into the steep bank on the side of the path. As the ground was wet, footprints were easily distinguished as well as plenty of hairs and fresh digging.

As we descended further into the wood we were treated with views of a breathtaking sett. The hillside was covered

with mounds of spoil, clear entrances and well-worn pathways jutting through the wild garlic.

The group split up and rambled the slopes, marvelling at how these animals have created such an impressive structure over many generations. It is very humbling to think that badgers may have been present on that wooded slope for hundreds of years, becoming an integral part of the woodland ecosystem and even the landscape in that area.

These workshops are a fantastic way to and learn from some of our badger experts and to meet other members of the Badger Group. They are suitable for all levels of experience and are a good chance to share your enthusiasm for this charismatic animal.



Badger at the fire station

Dave Williams

WSBG was called by a local resident to say that the site of the old Guildford fire station was being cleared. They thought there may be a badger sett on the site, since neighbours had regularly seen badgers. The position of the site, adjacent to Ladymead and the Stoke Road roundabout, seemed an unlikely place for a badger sett, but it needed looking at.

I went to the site and to my surprise I found a possible badger sett, in an earth mound, with three entrances which seemed to have been blocked. There was no one on site, and I had no tools with me. I went home and contacted Guildford Borough Council's planning department, who were not helpful and would not give me any information about the developer of the site. However, the resident who reported the incident also rang and managed to get the name of the planning officer, so I left an answerphone message for him explaining the situation.

Another Dave (from our group) fortunately agreed to meet me on site to help unblock the sett. The task proved very difficult as the earth had been compacted into each hole. We were just about to give up when the planning officer phoned me. He stated that an environmental consultant had been on site for several weeks and had been asked to phone me. I heard from this consultant shortly afterwards and he said that he was also surprised to find a sett there. He'd been monitoring it for several weeks and come to the conclusion (subsequently proved correct) that it was not used. He had blocked the entrances and was preparing to destroy the sett the next day, and didn't want anything to move back into the sett. **If only we'd had that information earlier.**

Later we were informed that badgers had been seen in the garden **since** the sett was blocked – good news, especially for an area seemingly unsuitable for badgers.

FOX HUNTING

Peter Eggleton

WE ALL THOUGHT FOX HUNTING WAS OVER, DIDN'T WE?

WELL IT ISN'T. The majority of hunts around the country could be hunting illegally. The weaknesses in the Hunting Act make it almost impossible to obtain a successful prosecution. If the hounds chase and kill a fox it isn't an offence, it is "an accident". It only becomes an offence if it can be demonstrated that there was intent to hunt, and this depends on what the huntsmen do when a fox is chased.

The hunts have developed methods to continue hunting but with the illusion that they are not breaching the regulations. Often when the hounds go into cry (chasing a fox) the huntsmen purposely drop back a bit in their pursuit, and can then make the claim that the hounds were too far away and they could not call them back and prevent an "accident".

All these accidents could be avoided if they went over to proper drag hunting, where non-fox-scent trails are laid, and then only laid in areas where foxes are not traditionally drawn out.

So if these hunts are not intentionally hunting foxes why do many of them take with them terrier men equipped with spades and dogs? In March this year hunt terrier men were caught attempting to dig out a fox in Surrey. I attended the incident but was not allowed access to the site to check that it was not a badger sett.

Our badger setts are still at risk from fox hunting operations and next season some of us will be doing more in the way of monitoring the hunts in Surrey. Anyone wishing to join in and help with this will be most welcome.

The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

Martin D'Arcy, SPA Warden

THE THAMES BASIN HEATHS make up 8,200 hectares of lowland heath in north-west Surrey, north-east Hampshire and south-east Berkshire. They consist of 13 sites, such as Chobham, Horsell, Wisley and Whitmoor Commons, Hazeley and Farnham Heaths, and Ash and Pirbright ranges.

Lowland heath is a scarce and disappearing habitat in Europe and the Thames Basin contains a substantial portion of the total remaining. Three rare birds are found here, and the area was made a Special Protection Area (SPA) as a result of the need to protect the habitat upon which the Dartford warbler, woodlark and nightjar depend. It is also home to all our native reptile species, including adder, smooth snake and sand lizard.

The SPA was designated when it became clear that development pressures were intensifying and threatening the existence of the heaths. Since then, under the strong protection this European designation ensures, serious mitigation is required before any development can take place. All new builds within 5km of the SPA pay a levy on every property which is used to fund the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (or SANGs) across the area. The idea of a SANG is that it offers people a place to

enjoy the outdoors without impacting directly on the fragile SPA habitat.

The pressure of such a large population upon our remaining natural spaces is intense. Thousands of people walk, ride, cycle and exercise their dogs on the heathlands. The sheer numbers threaten to destroy or degrade the habitat and the continual disturbance



www.rspb.org.uk

The beautiful nightjar, on which the Project's logo is based

impacts on the creatures that live there. The three birds mentioned are all ground-nesting, and without suitable measures to reduce disturbance, would inevitably suffer seriously.

The Strategic Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project was set up by Natural England, in partnership with 26 other organisations including 11 local authorities, three Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB, Forestry Commission, Ministry of Defence and Crown Estates. The aim of the SAMM project is to reduce





Whitmoor Common

disturbance by making the people who use the heaths for recreation aware of the plight of the birds, and how they can help by following some simple guidelines:

The first is to keep to the paths, and ensure their dogs do not run through the heather during the nesting season (March to August inclusive).

The second is where possible to use the SANGs, especially if they have dogs and would like to let them roam free.

The third is to clean up after their dogs.

The fourth is to reduce the risk of fire by not discarding cigarettes, and never lighting fires or barbeques.

The Project employs a group of wardens who patrol the 13 SPA sites daily, talking to visitors, explaining the

conservation value of the heaths and promoting the guidelines. It monitors how many people use the area and how effective the mitigation work is in reducing the pressure on the SPA.

As an SPA Warden, I try to engage with the public to get the message across that these beautiful spaces we love walking through are fragile and home to rare wildlife. I want them to understand that their actions matter, and that by working together and behaving responsibly we can ensure the heaths will be there for future generations.

These lowland heaths represent a fragment of what there once was, and their continued existence depends on all of us. By protecting the rare birds we guarantee the sites remain out-of-bounds for developers, and so available for us all to enjoy.

FOR EMERGENCIES CALL:

Your local Police Station / 999

Surrey Police (Wildlife Crime) call 101 to report an incident and ask for the Wildlife Crime Officer to be made aware

Wildlife Aid, Leatherhead 0906 1800132
(website www.wildlifeaid.org.uk)

RSPCA 0300 1234 999

Member of WSBG Committee

NEIGHBOURING BADGER GROUPS

East Surrey 01883 380321 (for non-emergencies e-mail espbs.badgers@gmail.com)

East Hants 01420 87366

West Sussex 01243 825804

Mid Sussex 01342 870320

Binfield, Berks 0709 2234377

Herts & Middx 01992 589152

BADGER TRUST

0845 828 7878 Website www.badgertrust.org.uk

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

P.O. BOX 67, GUILDFORD, SURREY GU3 1YR

Website www.wsbg.co.uk Tel/Fax 01483 811989 E-mail wsbg@wsbg.co.uk

Chairman Martin D'Arcy 07941 496187 mwfda@yahoo.com

Treasurer Position vacant

Secretary Dave Williams 01483 811989 dave@wsbg.co.uk

Membership Secretary Susan Clee 01483 763983 susan.clee171@gmail.com

Field Officer Dave Williams 01483 811989 dave@wsbg.co.uk

Other Committee members

Peter Eggleton 01428 607731 peter@plustrue.freereserve.co.uk

Rodger Munt 01276 29456 r.m.munt@btinternet.com

John Whitaker 01306 730733 jandhwhitaker@waitrose.com

Pat Williams 01483 811989 patwilliamsartist@gmail.com

Sue Carden 07940 594267 cardensusan@gmail.com

Alex Learmont 07903 804600 lexilearmount@msn.com

Newsletter Editor Clare Windsor 01483 418048 clare.windsor@waitrose.com

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday April 26 **Chris Matcham, former Otter Officer**

Chris will tell us all about **Otters**. He is the foremost otter expert for Surrey, having been for many years the Otter Project Officer for Surrey Wildlife Trust, creating riverside habitat and building holts.

Tuesday May 24 at 7.30 **WSBG AGM**

Following the short AGM our guest speaker is **Peter Martin**, Chairman of Badger Trust, who will tell us of his hopes and plans for the organisation. There will be refreshments, quizzes and a raffle.

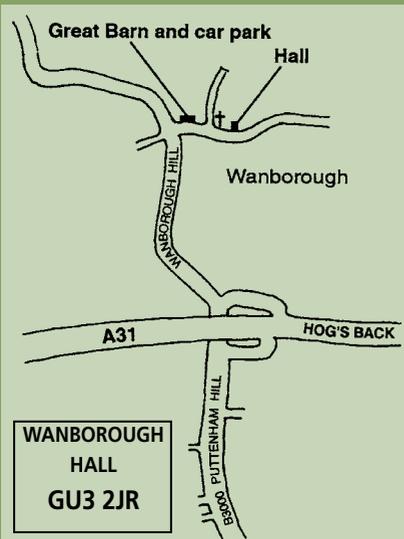
EVENTS WE SHALL ATTEND WITH OUR SALES STALL

Sunday June 19 **Wildlife Aid Open Day**

Randalls Road, Leatherhead, KT22 0AL

Sunday July 31 **Rustic Sunday**

Rural Life Museum, Reeds Road, Tilford, GU10 2DL



All evening meetings start at 8pm and are held in Wanborough Hall unless otherwise stated.

This is just off the A31 Hog's Back.

Take the B3000 exit (from Guildford it's the first exit) and follow signs to Wanborough. At the bottom of the hill turn right (signposted Great Barn and Church). The car park is on the left next to the Barn.

Walk up to the hall, just beyond the church.



The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of West Surrey Badger Group.

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