



WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP



NEWSLETTER 75 AUGUST 2016

Bait marking results A dog's lengthy adventure 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

Au Revoir, not Goodbye

by Pat Williams

BADGERS IN THE EU

CroatiaJazavac
DenmarkGraevling
EstoniaMager
FranceBlaireau
GermanyDachs
HungaryBorz
IrelandBroc
ItalyTasso
LithuaniaBarsukas
NetherlandsDas
PolandBorsuk
PortugalTexugo
RomaniaViezure
SloveniaJazvec
SpainTejon
SwedenGravling

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Martin D'Arcy

In May the Group held its Annual General Meeting, at which I summarised what we'd been doing over the previous year. For those members who couldn't make it to that meeting, here's a résumé of what I said:

Last September I attended the National Badger Conference, held in Colchester. It was informative and stimulating, and it was particularly good to meet so many enthusiasts who were working hard all over the country, and abroad, to protect the badger. Participants came from Holland and Ireland as well as from a wide range of English badger groups. (Perhaps what stands out most in my memory is the sight and sound of a 6' 3" Dutchman playing the bagpipes at full throttle as he marched into the canteen!) A lot of the discussion was on the badger cull, which continued for a third year and was extended into Dorset.

In preparation for a potential escalation of the culling programme, a website was set up by the Badger Action Network (badgeractionnetwork.org.uk) to coordinate the various groups that were trying to protect badgers in the cull zones. Thank you to those of our members who went to take part in anti-cull patrols, and to the souls who braved the cold of February to join the march in Brighton.

Last October we had a very successful National Badger Day sponsored walk along the North Downs Way. The weather was decent and we had a lovely stroll through the beautiful countryside, raising nearly £1,000 for Badger Trust in the process. Thanks to all who took part, and those who sponsored us.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Enid Brewer	Caroline Hayes
Jenny & Michael Creamer	Kathryn Killner Wendy Meredith

To involve more members in field work, we held a day's workshop to provide training in badger behaviour and ecology, and also in the practical details of dealing with badgers when called out to emergencies. The classroom session was followed by an excursion to a nearby sett where we could look for field signs and hone our newly acquired spotting skills.

We have hosted a number of interesting and knowledgeable speakers for our series of evening talks. Topics this year have ranged from Surrey to Borneo, bats to sand lizards, the decline of the bumblebee to the recovery of the otter. The talks were fascinating, illuminating and enjoyable. My thanks go to all the speakers, and to all of you who joined us to share the evenings.

Finally, I would like to offer a huge thank you to all members of the committee for their dedication, enthusiasm, and support. Our Treasurer, Nigel Mee, had indicated at last year's AGM that he wished to stand down, but because we had been unable to find a replacement, he very kindly agreed to stay on for another year. Happily, Caroline Hayes has now stepped in as Treasurer – we are so grateful to her. We owe a heartfelt thank you to Nigel for his vital contributions to the Group. Fortunately, he intends to continue some involvement with us as a member and also on projects such as the Hindhead study.

Another long-term committee stalwart, the inimitable Rodger Munt, is also standing down after many years dedicated service. His scientific approach, attention to detail, and precision mapping skills will be greatly missed. Thank you

Rodger for all your time and effort.

Now retired from the Wildlife Trust, Dave Williams has thrown himself full-time into badger work, both as a Field Officer and in reviewing planning proposals for their impact on badgers. He and Peter Eggleton provide us with an expert professional approach, often in contrast to the so-called professionals employed by developers to produce environmental assessments. Many thanks to both Dave and Peter.

Sue Carden, Alex Learmont, and Pat Williams contribute in a variety of ways, creative, practical and administrative, helping out with cheerful enthusiasm, ensuring the group runs smoothly. And Pat's superb illustrations are unforgettable. Thank you all.

John Whitaker has the unenviable task of trying to sort out Ruxley, a task he continues doggedly and with unfailing grace and good humour.

Thank you to Susan Clee our Membership Secretary for her work in the crucial task of maintaining an accurate list of members and ensuring subscriptions are renewed.

Thanks too to Dave Smith for his assistance on numerous occasions, particularly in the installation and preparation of the new WSBG shed.

Once again I'd like to commend Clare Windsor for taking our eclectic and disparate submissions of articles and sprinkling a little magic to turn out a polished newsletter every time.

And lastly, thanks to all our members for continuing to support us and contributing to the work we do together for badgers in West Surrey.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Caroline Hayes

I want to take the opportunity to introduce myself as the Group's new Treasurer. I have recently taken on the role from Nigel and his is a very hard act to follow! I would like to emphasise my thanks to him for having carried out the role so effectively and for providing me with such patient help.

We are currently in the process of changing over the bank accounts and all the other various administrative tasks that go with handing over the role.

Apart from the day-to-day activities we have identified two areas that I will also be working on initially. HMRC guidance has

been clarified over the last few years with regards to Gift Aid and the Group needs to update its existing systems and records. We would also like to reduce our two 'current' bank accounts to one and move our HSBC activity to our Co-op account; this would require changing members' standing orders for subs. We'll be writing to you later in the year asking for your help with both these processes.

Since I am new to the Group (and new to badgers!) please do say 'hello' and I am looking forward very much to meeting everyone and getting more involved.

PLANNING REPORT

Dave Williams

Churt

There's an application in Churt on a large plot of fairly wild land. It appears that a survey report was given to the council, but the report did not state that the consultant had actually visited and walked over the site, it just stated that the habitat seemed unsuitable. Churt is a very good area for badgers. Jaqui and Alan visited the site and found a sett outside and pathways leading into the property. Jacqui contacted the planning officer and we have written to Waverley Planning, to insist that a proper survey is completed which includes checking the whole site.

Frimley

The huge development continues at the old Deepcut Barracks. Rodger has been working tirelessly on this, making sure that the consultant does the survey properly and also pointing out setts that they've missed. This is really inexcusable, but there seems to be

no authority who will take this up and put some penalties onto the consultant.

At the last minute, thanks to Rodger finding the sett, we were able to get some protection for a 3-hole active sett that had been missed. It's close to where a 'Spy' road (basically an access road) is being made. After a lot of e mail exchanges I managed to get them to agree to put up a protective fence, with acoustic barriers to protect the sett during the road construction. No machinery or works will take place behind this fence, and an ecologist will be on site during the construction of the road nearest the badger sett. This will be an ongoing problem as more and more houses are planned for the site.

Merrow

We now have the consultant's report regarding the development in Merrow that Sue and Dave were checking. The report seems reasonable, in that they're only intending to close a small 4-entrance annexe sett and leaving the *[continued on page 8]*

BAIT MARKING RESULTS

Dave Williams

BACK IN 2014, WSBG, in conjunction with RSPCA, released a group of orphaned badger cubs. They were radio-collared so we were able to track them for their first summer of freedom. Using cameras the following year we established that cubs had been born, and we then tried to find out which of the original badgers were still surviving. We did this by using a remote chip reader, as each of the badgers had a unique chip inserted prior to their release.

To further our knowledge, this spring we did a bait marking survey, to determine if the badgers held territories. Bait marking is used to

discover where badgers forage and thus define their territories. The process sounds simple, but in reality can be very difficult. Bait containing a marker is fed at each sett, and then dung pits are checked to see which marker they contain (that's providing you have found enough dung pits). We used six colours as we had six setts that were showing signs of occupation. Gold was for S1, named Milestone Sett as it was near the milestone marker on the old A3. White was for S2, called A3 Sett as it overlooked the new A3 where it left the tunnel. Red was for S3, Hilltop Sett (yes it was on a hilltop). Lilac was for S4, Punchbowl Sett, which was on the



Nigel and Dave searching through a dung pit for coloured pellets

slopes of the Punchbowl. Nearby, silver was for S5, a subsidiary sett. Further away from the area containing S1-S5 was S6, Highcombe Sett (also known as Nigel's sett), using the colour yellow.

The bait was mixed ready to put out. It consisted of a bucket of peanuts mixed with about 20% of small pieces of coloured plastic; over this we poured a jar of warm golden syrup, and left it to soak through for 24 hours. This made a very tasty, sticky mix of peanuts and plastic pellets. We had to make six bucketfuls, enough for putting out bait on five consecutive nights. Normally it should take 24 hours to pass through a badger and be deposited in a dung pit.

We had previously completed some survey work to look for dung pits. A group of WSBG members had searched as much of the area as possible just before the vegetation started to grow, which would then make it much more difficult to find these small scrapes in the ground containing badger droppings. The bait marking was carried out in the spring when badgers are usually very active, with males particularly marking their territories.

The first night Peter and I put out



Bait covered with heavy stone



Bucket of mixed bait

bait at each sett – a big pile or two outside active holes – and also a large dollop thrown down into the tunnel. The piles of bait outside must be partially buried and covered with as large a stone as you can find. This stops other animals and birds from getting to the bait. The badger is strong enough to push the stone out of the way. We left the bait in a bucket with a lid on, and stowed safely nearby to save carrying backwards and forwards to each sett. We continued for five consecutive nights, also looking for dung pits as we put the bait down. Surprisingly at the A3 sett I found colour pellets in a dung pit on the second evening, which disproves the theory that it takes 24 hours to go through a badger.

After the fifth day, we had a few more WSBG members help with a search for dung pits and check for coloured pellets. It must look strange to see people on their knees poking at and examining animal droppings on a Sunday morning. The pellets appear quite bright so can be found without too much trouble. However, in most of

the dung pits we had more than one colour. This meant either that these badgers were not territorial, or there was a greedy male who went round all the dung pits early in the evening, ate all the food and dropped it at all the



Dung pit with different coloured pellets

other setts in the area. But even if this was the case some of the dung pits were very close to the setts, so this meant that the greedy male would have been entering other badger territories.

It's difficult to plot all the movements on one map, as they were all interacting together and in some dung pits we found four colours. The exception was sett S6, baited with yellow; we found only yellow in the Highcombe area dung pits, and no other colour.

If you look at the diagram, you will see that sett S2's white pellets gave us most information. White pellets were found in dung pits D2, D3, D1, D5, D6, and D9. Sett S1 only gave us

two recoveries of pellets – D7 near the sett and D9 all the way over to the Highcombe area.

We conclude from this exercise that although the badgers appear to be living in different setts, they have not become fiercely territorial. So badgers from A3 Sett have travelled to Punchbowl Sett, Hilltop Sett and

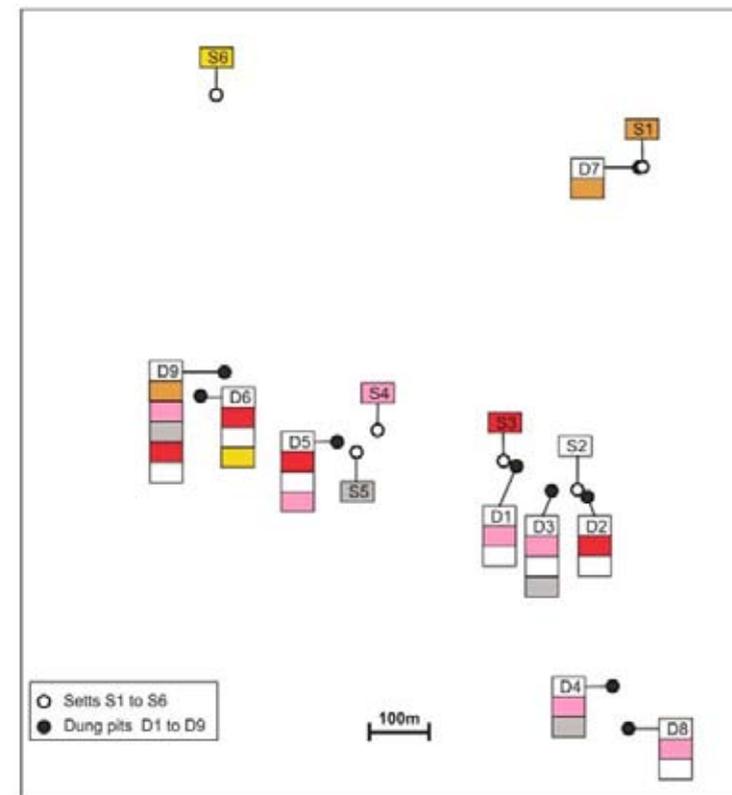


Chart showing results

Subsidiary Sett, and also in the dung pit area towards Highcombe, but not any nearer to the Highcombe Sett. Badgers from Highcombe Sett did not seem to enter the territory of the A3 Sett.

Our next project is to deploy the chip reader at each sett together with

cameras. We aim to find out which of the original five badgers are still there and which setts they are using. We also aim to get a good idea of how many badgers are in each sett.

We'll give a further update in the next newsletter.



One of the five radio-collared badgers

Chip reader installed in its little country cottage

[PLANNING REPORT continued from page 4]

sett and another annexe sett, since the building is far enough away not to cause damage or disturbance.

Sunningdale

There are a lot of large houses on the estate surrounding Wentworth Golf Course. We don't know where badgers are living on the estate, but it is certainly suitable habitat. We're aware of one small sett, which our dear friend and colleague Jeff Clarke used to monitor. It's just behind a row of garages. The block of flats is now up for development and they also want to refurbish the garages.

The application was about to be approved the evening of the day we were alerted. We discussed this with Surrey Wildlife Trust's planning officer, who had discovered that there had been no environmental survey attached to the

planning application. We both wrote to Runnymede Borough Council to ask for assurance that planning permission included the condition that a full environmental survey should be conducted and a mitigation strategy implemented for any protected species on the site, before any works take place. This was an oversight on the part of the Borough Council, but again there seems to be no comeback against the officers.

We're not sure of the status of the sett, which is only two holes. My last visit showed that the holes were clear, but with bramble growing over the two entrances it seems to be not currently used. Perhaps there's another sett nearby.

Camberley

A small piece of woodland close to Camberley Golf Course is the subject of

an application for three houses. It was originally a larger woodland but has been eroded by houses at each side. The new house owners are now complaining about losing woodland and are concerned about the badgers in the area.

The consultant's report stated that

there was a small sett that was hardly used. I managed to check the site and concluded that this sett hadn't been used for several years, whereas I'm sure there's an active sett nearby on the golf course where the badgers that visit neighbouring gardens reside.

We will not object to this application.

SECRETARY'S AND FIELD OFFICER'S REPORT

Dave Williams

First some good news

Back in January, we were lucky enough to be chosen by Waitrose in Godalming to be one of their chosen charities that month. Tokens are given to shoppers who can then select one of three charities to give their tokens to. After a month the tokens are collected and counted. I'm not sure how many tokens equal one pound, but we received a cheque for £300. Our grateful thanks to those of you who shopped in Waitrose and gave tokens, and of course a big thank you to Waitrose.

Knaphill

A caller from Knaphill thought badgers were digging under her garden fence from a piece of woodland, and was concerned about her nearby shed. I believe it is badgers, but at the time I was unable to confirm as I couldn't access the woodland area. However, I suggested that she need not worry since there wasn't much of a spoil heap, and the hole was well below the level of the garden. I'll return when I can find out how to gain access to the woodland.

Aldershot 1

I had two calls from Aldershot, not an area with many badgers but there are a few. The first was from the manager of a small estate of serviced homes mostly for the elderly. It was right in the middle of urban Aldershot, and seemed an unlikely place.

On one side there was a 4-foot brick wall with a flower bed, and then a sloping bank around 3 metres covered in thick vegetation. They suspected that there was a badger living there. And they were right, I could see three active entrances and there were possibly more that I couldn't see. There were pathways leading from the bank. The badgers weren't in the way, so I suggested that they just leave them. They agreed and said they would call us if there were problems.

Aldershot 2

The other call was from the Hampshire side of Aldershot, and more rural. At a large business park with a lot of woodland around it, they've seen badgers on the security cameras. Liking to be ecologically friendly in what they do, they wanted to make sure that any work undertaken in the woods would not disturb the badgers. (They have some trees that are dangerous and also need to remove some Scots pine and replant with broadleaf.) I couldn't see the active setts, as the woods were very overgrown and some thick rhododendron made it difficult to penetrate. I said that WSBG could do a survey for them, but at a later date as I wasn't dressed that day for scrabbling through undergrowth and didn't have the time. I gave them some advice about removing trees near badger setts, and

suggested that the best thing to do is leave them alone. If only all calls were like these two!

Byfleet

We had a worrying call from a lady in Byfleet, who thought that badgers had burrowed into her parents' grave. This could be very problematic, because if human remains are dug up, a Home Office licence is required for re-interment, quite apart from the problem of humanely evicting the badgers. Although the lady was very worried she was adamant that no animals should be harmed. Since she was just about to go away, she gave us the contact details

for her sister, who could help to locate the grave.

Sue and Dave came forward again and volunteered to take a look and try to determine if it was badgers. But by the time they got there it had been backfilled, and the sister was certain there were no animals in there and that it was a fox digging in the soft ground and exposing the coffin. Big sigh of relief, as it would have given us a lot of work. We hope the sister was correct. There were no signs of badgers nearby.

There have been two calls of badgers under sheds, but in both cases the animals moved on after a couple of weeks.

Dog down a sett for . . . how long?

Sue Carden

FOLLOWING A CALL TO WSBG recently regarding a possible dog down a badger sett, I visited the property in question in Weybridge. Apparently the little dachshund, Dash, belonged to the house-owner's daughter who had visited the previous day, and knowing his penchant for holes and that the back garden had a badger sett, she had wisely kept him in the house. Unfortunately, however, Dash escaped through the cat flap, and at the time of my visit had been missing for more than 24 hours.

I was led through the house to a rear deck, and suddenly found myself in a 'mini jungle', the garden immediately behind the decking just completely dropping away into a steep wooded slope. I scrambled around and quickly established that the badger sett was indeed a very active one, which was the main purpose of the visit. I also found little doggy paw prints in the spoil heap next to the largest hole, just a couple of yards down from the deck. But despite sticking my head down several holes and calling, I heard nothing.

I clambered back up the slope and duly reported back to the house-owner, who told me the badgers had moved in a few years ago when the council had built on their original home a short distance away.

Needless to say, the dog's owner, who was now back home in Beaconsfield, was frantic with worry, and wanted to know if there was anything we could do. Unfortunately in these situations, apart from continuing to call and putting a bit of food outside the hole, there really wasn't much I could suggest. I was at that stage fairly hopeful he would still come out.

Hearing nothing for the next few days, however, I feared the worst, so I was amazed and delighted to receive an ecstatic text from Dash's owner **after 6 days** saying that the little dog had "turned up woofing at her father's door, skeletal thin and dehydrated". He was in hospital on a drip but he would be fine.

A happy ending for one very lucky little dog! I don't think he'll be going near any more badger setts.

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

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WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday September 27

Mike Coates

RSPB FARNHAM AND HAZELEY HEATHS

Mike is RSPB warden in the Tilford and Haslemere area. He will talk about his work and the birds on his patch, particularly on two reserves which both contain nightjars and tree pipits – thriving due to the major heathland restoration projects that Mike has overseen.

Tuesday October 18

David Gill

GEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPES OF SURREY

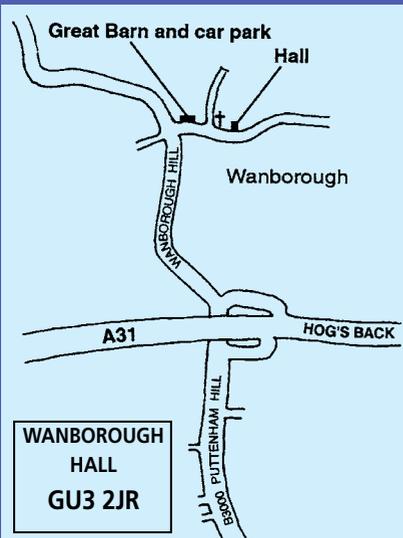
David is an amateur geologist. His illustrated and interactive talk will cover the rocks found in our county and where we can find them. You will discover our geological history (through fossils) and how geology affects the local landscape, soils and wildlife including, possibly, the distribution of badgers!

Tuesday November 22

Lizzie Croose

RETURN OF THE POLECAT

Lizzie is Mustelid Officer for the Vincent Wildlife Trust, and is coordinating the Trust's National Polecat Survey. Polecats are spreading and there may already be some in Surrey. So find out how to recognise one and where they are most likely to be. Lizzie has also been involved in pine marten research and survey work in Scotland, so we may hear about this charismatic mammal as well.



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

This is just off the A31 Hogs 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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