



WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

NEWSLETTER 70 JANUARY 2015



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

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COVER PICTURE

Silent night for ever

by Pat Williams

.....

Welcome to our
new members

Linda Conduit
Alexandra Learmont
Penny Rushton

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Martin D'Arcy

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP is a small but dedicated band of badger enthusiasts. We come from many walks of life but we are brought together by a shared interest in the much-loved, somewhat misunderstood, sometimes maligned, iconic yet mysterious creature, the badger. The recent best-selling book by Patrick Barkham, *Badgerlands*, details the history of man's relationship with this enigmatic animal. It is a fascinating, although at times disturbing, insight into how the badger has been treated over the centuries. Running through the book is his mission, initially without success, to see badgers in the wild. When he finally does, he describes it as follows:

"When I embarked upon this journey into Badgerland, I had wanted to study the animal dispassionately, assess its part in spreading bovine TB carefully and give a fair hearing to those who believed it should be culled. At that moment, marvelling at the grace of the badgers of the Black Country, I realised this would be harder than I anticipated. These animals were so charming and innocent; stoic, independent and enduring. In this twilight, it seemed a basic decency to give them peace; they had a right to a life free from our persecution, and from our charity."

Beautiful and moving writing, and I am sure most of us would agree with those sentiments. I wish they did not require our charity, but so long as they are persecuted, run over and disturbed by continual development, then groups like ours will be needed. I thank all our members for their support, and I hope you will continue to give your help to us and to the badgers.

A happy 2015 to all.

BADGER TRUST REPORT

Dave Williams

IN OUR LAST NEWSLETTER I told you that Badger Trust had been granted permission to lodge a judicial review against the government's (Defra and Natural England) decision to conduct pilot badger culls, without an independent expert panel to assess their humaneness and the effectiveness. The case was heard and two weeks later the judge ruled in favour of the government. Badger Trust applied to the court for leave to appeal, and this was granted immediately by an appeal judge.

In the appeal court the evidence seemed to be heavily weighted against Defra and Natural England, so we were in a positive mood. When the judgement was given, the three judges were unanimous in favouring the defendant, and indeed were rather scathing about Badger Trust, which certainly had not seemed the case in court. Who knows what goes on behind the scenes in the establishment?

As you will see on other pages, badger marches continued in Colchester, Oxford and Winchester.

Recently a group of eminent scientists, vets, and a farmer signed a letter sent to David Cameron, pointing out that culling could make the problem of cattle tb worse, and that the government should follow the example of the Welsh government by improving cattle tb testing and imposing better control on cattle movements. Wales has achieved a massive 48% drop in cattle tb in four years. To date he has not responded.

I sent the letter to Guildford MP Anne Milton, and have received a very unsatisfactory reply which I will respond to. Martin also sent the letter to Jeremy Hunt, MP for South West Surrey, again receiving a very poor answer which Martin has responded but so far has heard no more. Please write to your MP and

ask them to look at the situation in Wales and abandon culling and improve cattle testing and movement controls.

In the meantime, after figures were released by Defra on the costs of the 2013 cull, it was calculated that each badger killed cost a staggering £5,200. Minutes from the British Veterinary Association (BVA) board meeting showed that the decision to back continuation of the pilot culls was not the choice of the majority, but only a small minority. It could mean that the BVA will now oppose any more pilot culls, which will embarrass the government.

Results from the 2014 pilot cull were released just after the parliamentary recess. Again they showed a failure to meet the target (by less than half) in Gloucestershire. In Somerset they just achieved what was a very low target, but at what cost? There is no independent scrutiny.

Despite this, Secretary of State Liz Truss has stated that culls will continue and will be rolled out to other parts of the country, but no announcement will be made before the election. It is clear that if the Conservatives win with a majority, then culling will go ahead, while Lib Dems seem now to have gone off the idea and will oppose any culling plans. Labour are totally against and will abandon all ideas about badger culling. We understand that UKIP will allow culling to proceed and will also back a move to repeal the Hunting Act.

Please note that the next Badger Rally will be in Birmingham on 21st February to coincide with the NFU conference.

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Thanks to all who bought Badger Trust raffle tickets. The raffle made around £7,000 pounds, with one of our members winning the first prize of £1,000.

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TREASURER'S REPORT

Nigel Mee

Five months since I last sat down to write a Treasurer's report and it seems like yesterday. Since July we have had good summer and autumn weather with an exceptionally warm October. Statisticians are talking about 2014 as being overall the potentially warmest year since records began. Well, statistics are always interesting and certainly the fruit and vegetable crops in the garden were good, but as I look out of the window today and see the parked cars white with frost I still can't help thinking that southern Spain is the place to be right now!

Of course the English countryside wouldn't be what it is without the cold of the winters so I hope you are keeping warm in your homes while the badgers do the same deep in their setts.

The year so far

Financially the group remains strong thanks to the kind bequest from Clem last year. The funds we received will prove important in coming years and this year is giving a pointer, in that so far expenditure is outstripping income but the bank accounts remain healthy.

To give a little more detail for the year so far, income has been £4,314 and expenditure £7,113, thus a shortfall of some £2,799. However, there remains over £52k available to us in the bank accounts. A couple of years ago, before Clem's bequest, we could not have entertained such a shortfall but now we're in a strong position to spend money towards our work and to help similar organisations.

Our spending

The charity this year has donated £1,000 to Wildlife Aid, £2,000 to the Badger Trust and £250 to Care for the Wild International – donations that could not have happened had we less money available to us.



We have purchased three Bushnell night cameras and a nightscope. This is £933 worth of equipment invaluable for monitoring the setts at badger release sites and for assisting the field officers when they attend to reports of possible badgers in gardens etc.

And as to me . . .

Some members may be aware that I am retiring from the committee and as Treasurer at the end of the financial year. Family and work commitments have meant that after more than five years in the roles I now need to step aside. It's good to know that financially the WSBG is in a healthy position after a couple of difficult years whilst the recession bit hard, and I'm confident that it's a good time for someone else to take over.

I won't be disappearing entirely as I want to continue supporting the charity's important work on projects like badger releases and the sales stalls, as well as still attending demos and the Wanborough meetings.

I will certainly be fully available to help my successor ease in to the Treasurer role. If you are considering taking this on please don't hesitate to call me, or indeed any of the committee, for an informal chat (contact details at the end of the newsletter). The books really are not at all complicated. Promise!

I hope you all had a great holiday period over Christmas. Thank you all for your continuing support.

The Chilworth Maginot Line (for badgers)

Alan Johnson

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, we received a plea for help from the owner of one of a series of five terraced cottages in Chilworth. A badger (we suspect a lone male) was causing chaos in their gardens.

Each of the affected gardens is about 50m long, but less than 10m wide, and Mr Badger had clearly been intent on obtaining food from each in turn – plums beneath a heavy-fruited tree seemed a particular target, and bird food from underneath a feeder another. Rather sadly, he was also taking a midnight dip in a pond, resulting in ever-decreasing numbers of frogs. In the process, he was not only

digging under fences, but in some cases crashing through wooden panels, and knocking over pots and the like.

Various strategies were tried, without success. Manually blocking the entrances being used didn't work. Diverting him with peanuts was equally futile. In the end, the only choice was to try to stop him at the first point of access: a fence between the first garden and the adjoining land. One 10m section of the fencing was insecure, and a clear access point was visible where he had dug underneath. It was now the end of November. At this stage cue Peter Eggleton, Jacqui Christmas and Alan Johnson armed with a selection of spades and fencing paraphernalia to secure the boundary with a new section of stock fencing.

The first job was to dig a suitable trench alongside the fence (Peter and Alan). Next, to cut a length of fencing (Jacqui). Then to fix the fencing in the trench (Alan – see photo). And finally to back-fill the trench (all – mainly Peter).

The potential flaw in the plan is that this section of fencing, whilst the most obviously vulnerable, is but one part of a much longer run. Readers will doubtless remember the cunning plan of French Minister of War, André Maginot, who built an impressive line of fortifications along the Franco-German border in the 1930s, only to find that the Germans marched around it via Belgium. So too, perhaps, the Chilworth badger fencing. We shall see...

Is Alan on a hiding to nothing here?





RUSTIC SUNDAY JULY 2014

Nigel Mee

In July Sue, Jacqui and I were on the WSBG sales stall at the Rural Life Centre in Tilford for its "Rustic Sunday". The sun shone and the crowds came.

We didn't take much money but then we weren't there just for that. Whilst it's always nice to make a few sales at these things, more important is raising awareness of badgers and their plight, and there was plenty of chatting to be had with people about that! It's interesting that badgers are on people's minds because of the government's awful badger cull, and yes they do want to talk about it to us. It does worry people and that is indeed evident by the concern they show in what they say and what they ask. What a shame the

government isn't concerned with what the layperson thinks.

On a happier note, the day was quite a success for the organisers. Every stall seemed to have visitors and what a variety of stalls there were: craftsmen, rustic pastimes, organic foods and wildlife organisations, alongside live musicians, dog competitions, steam-driven vehicles, horse-drawn rides and the steam train running round the site on three sides.

All in all a jolly good day out! You can get a taste of it by watching the Community Channel half hour programme on the web here: <http://www.communitychannel.org/video/Aafdfh8ubs/>

The Winchester March

Martin D'Arcy

It was a damp, grey day in late November when the determined core of the Badger Army assembled in Winchester for the final march of 2014. An impressive number of West Surrey Badger Group (WSBG) members were in the hardy crowd, including six of the committee and the ever-willing banner-bearers, Vanessa and David.

Under the gloomy, steel-grey skies we gathered in the Abbey Gardens to hear the speakers. First was the local wildlife presenter, Chris Packham, who gave a thoughtful discourse, reminding us that alliances were needed with other interest groups in order to work together for the best outcome for conservation.

He was followed by the enthusiastic Dominic Dyer, Chief Executive of the Badger Trust, who raised the temperature and got us fired up at the injustice and illogicality of the cull.

We heard from two speakers in the killing zones: one from Somerset and one from Gloucestershire. The Somerset zone, the speaker noted, has a relatively low number of dairy farms, but a large acreage of shooting estates, which might lead you to query the reasons it was chosen for piloting the cull. There were some distressing details of the inhumanity that shooting can involve, as well as disturbing anecdotes of collusion between the police and the National Farmers Union (NFU). At one point this extended to the NFU having a team in the police control room feeding information directly to and from shooters. So much for police impartiality! But as

the Gloucestershire speaker reminded us, we need to build links with the police and farmers so that we can forge an alliance with those prepared to listen to the scientific evidence and work towards the goal of reducing bovine tuberculosis (bTB) and saving badgers.

Chastened by some of the grim stories from the front-line, but encouraged by the fact that once again many ordinary people had gone out night after night to face down the shooters and had ensured that the culls failed to meet their grisly targets, we set off on our march through the crowded streets of Winchester. There was a market and the early signs of the Christmas rush which meant the narrow streets were packed.

We chanted our usual call and response, with a subtle twist. To the call "SAVE OUR BADGERS", instead of the previous "STOP THE CULL" a more appropriate "NO MORE CULLS" was sounded (except by your Chairman who got halfway round the city before realising!). The marchers were determined but cheerful and, as always, many interesting, quirky and eye-catching



A handbag full of peanuts maybe?

costumes and banners were on show. There were many varieties of badger hats, masks and mascots, with an overall theme of black and white stripes.

The milling crowds paused in their consumerist intent to watch and wonder as this loud, stripy assembly made its noisy way through them. The point of the marches is to raise awareness of the cull and undoubtedly the sight of badger-costumed chanters led by high-vis-coated policemen will have caught many peoples' attention and led them to ask "What's it all about?" The drizzle began just as we were making our way back into the Gardens for photographs to be taken.

The marching season will resume in 2015 in Birmingham on 21st February to coincide with the NFU conference. As 2015 is election year, it will be crucial to the future of how the bovine TB issue is dealt with. We must make our voices heard so that whoever gains power realises that culling badgers is NOT the answer. Be loud, be brave and make your concerns known to your MPs. It is surprising how opinions can change when votes are at stake!

So be ready to take up the banners in 2015 with renewed vigour. **We are making progress and together we can SAVE OUR BADGERS!**



Chris Packham



Dominic Dyer



WSBG representation



WSBG representation

BADGER RELEASE PROJECT UPDATE

Nigel Mee

IN THE APRIL 2014 newsletter Jacqui Christmas and Alan Johnson wrote an update report on the release of badgers with radio collars. This report is a follow-up to that. In April 2014 the radio batteries had all finally died and we had to resort to using night cameras and visual watch.

Without the radio transmitters we no longer know which badger is which and where it had stayed the night. So whilst still giving us important data, all we have to go on now is evidence that a badger is present at a particular sett at a certain date and time. So much depends on where the night camera gets positioned. Just because the camera does not pick up a badger does not mean that a badger isn't there that night: it may be just that it did not pass in front of the camera and trigger the lens.

However, the night cameras do give great results and we are all getting better at using them on site. I personally like to keep the camera set to trigger 24 hours a day. That way I pick up all wildlife activity and the day shots are in colour too. So I don't get just badgers on record but deer, foxes, rodents, many types of birds – in one instance a buzzard (or sparrowhawk, not sure which).

Over the summer of 2014 I made a few sporadic trips to three of the more regularly used setts in this project and set up a night camera, sometimes for a night or two, on one occasion for a fortnight, with some reportable results. At no time was a badger filmed still wearing a collar,

but the RSPCA had warned us that they would drop off over time.

1. The sett described by Jacqui and Alan as "Nigel's sett" (to give its real name would identify its location) is a kilometre from the group of nine setts that the badgers had been discovered to have used. Alan Seymour had taken some great film there showing one badger with a collar and one badger without, grooming each other. In April and May I looked for activity there and found none at all. Visually it looked unvisited and a fortnight with a camera in situ gave me no footage except mice (coming in and out of the sett entrance) and squirrels.
2. I moved on to a sett well used by the released badgers where sometimes as many as four of the five were indicated underground at the same time by the radio transmitters. Here there was plenty of evidence of activity. Footage shows badgers coming out of the sett and also appearing just to be passing by in both May and July 2014.
3. The third sett monitored over the summer was a sett probably 1.25 kilometres from the sett mentioned in 1) above. Here the badger known as "3" had made his main base when the radio transmitters still worked. Often with the female "4" he had kept to an area never far from the artificial sett where they were originally released. On the first night after they were given free rein to roam, "3" had stayed in the artificial sett while the others had moved en masse to a nearby natural sett. It seemed "3" always went his own way. There was always one badger in residence at this

sett whenever the camera was left out in May, July and August 2014. The photo with this article shows whichever badger was there coming out of the sett before dusk on 28/07/2014. Was it "3"? We'll never know now.

On Sunday 16/11/2014 I walked round eight of the ten setts monitored during the late summer through autumn to early winter of 2013 whilst the batteries still gave power to the radio transmitters.

- a) The first sett I visited, near to the one mentioned at 2) above, was always under thick bracken. This time it was possible to see that it's not so much a sett as a one-hole outlier. There was no sign of any activity, and the sett entrance was filled with leaves.
- b) I then moved on to the same as the 2) mentioned previously where two large entrance holes were freshly dug out and looking currently very well used.
- c) Next was the first sett that four badgers moved to after final release, sporadically

using it over the weeks until it eventually seemed abandoned. On this visit I was surprised to see the paths to the set well trodden, but the nearby footpath had been recently cleared by a volunteer working party so that may be misleading. It's worth further monitoring.

- d) Then I moved on to the original artificial sett. It was very clear it was totally unused and abandoned.
- e) The next sett I visited had been used sporadically in the previous autumn but now looked empty, with leaves filling all the entrance holes.
- f) This was the sett talked about at 3) above. The main hole had been very recently dug out.
- g) I passed a one-hole outlier full of leaves.
- h) The final check was at a sett used very often by badgers number "3" and "4". Two holes were clear and the site looked fairly recently active.

It was an interesting tour on that Sunday and indicates that badgers continue to live in the area of the July 2013 release.



One of the badgers captured on camera leaving a sett before dusk in July. We suspect it's badger "3", but have no confirmation because by this time all the radio collars had fallen off.

Another example of bad surveying

Rodger Munt

In Newsletter 64, January 2013, we listed a few incidences where consultants had inaccurately represented badger activity in planning situations. Example 1 in that list illustrated the case of a consultant reporting that there was no activity in or around a site planned for development, but we subsequently found very clear evidence of badger activity all over the site and two setts within 2 metres of the site boundary, where we filmed badger activity.

Thus we were somewhat sceptical when last year the same consultant reported that the habitat was not suitable for badgers on another site in Camberley, where a planning application had been submitted to build houses. Both Dave Williams and I responded on this, to advise the Local Authority Planning Department. It is useful to summarise the chronology of events:

- **April 2013:** Consultant survey states that there are no protected species on site and the habitat is not suitable for badgers.

- **July 2013:** We state that the habitat is suitable for badgers, pointing out that our records show a badger sett on the adjacent neighbouring property and there is strong evidence of badger activity in the general area.

- **November 2013:** Consultant uses an assumed location for the sett to suggest that it is too far away to impact on the development.

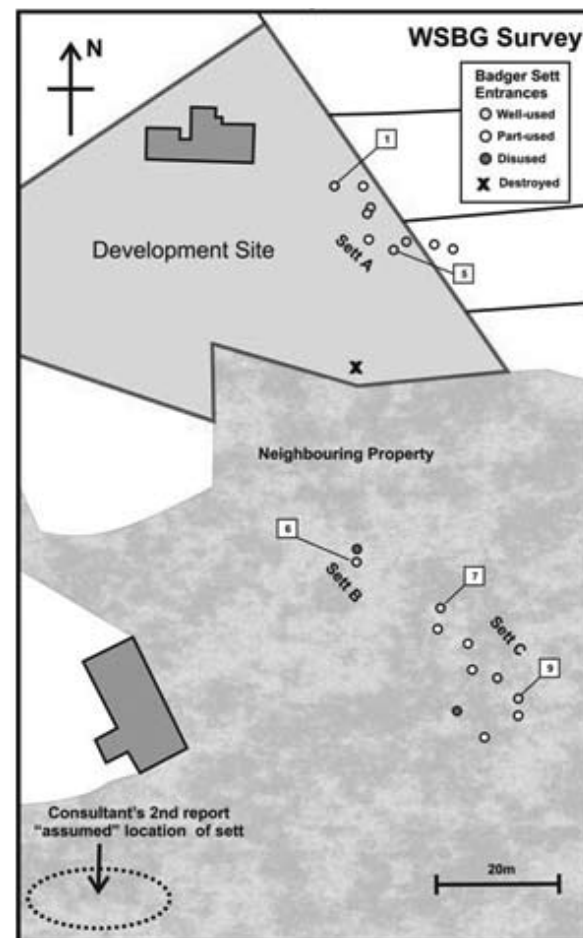
- **December 2013:** We point out that the location of the sett is wrong,

and anyway one needs to undertake a thorough survey of all surrounding properties as there could be setts close to the boundary with tunnels running into the site.

- **January 2014:** Consultant surveys the neighbouring property and finds the true location of the sett but as an afterthought revisits the site to discover that there is after all a sett on site.

- **March 2014:** We are invited by the Local Authority and the land owner to visit the site to clarify the situation.

I surveyed the site in March 2014, going in blind without any preconception of what I might find. The site is on sandy ground sloping into a wooded valley bounded by playing fields and gardens with long lawns. This is ideal habitat for badgers. However, most of the ground of the site had been cleared on the basis of the consultant's original report which stated that there were no protected species on site. One area that was being used to grow vegetables had remained untouched, behind which there were trees and bushes on sloping ground. I made a beeline for this highly suitable badger habitat and bingo! found a very active sett with 9 entrances, contrasting with the consultant's survey which quoted 4 partially-used/disused entrances which omitted the very active entrances closest to the existing house. This is labelled Sett **A** in the diagram opposite, taken from the WSBG report. The diagram also shows that on the adjacent property there is a sett with 9 entrances, labelled **B**, again



contrasting with the consultant's survey which only identified 3 entrances, and a sett, labelled **C**, which was missed by the consultant. He made the excuse that Sett **A** was hidden by undergrowth and hence could only be found after the ground had been cleared, but this is clearly inaccurate because the area of the vegetable patch with the sett behind had always been the most obvious place to look. Of more concern is the admission that the ground had not been completely surveyed by the consultant. As one often finds annex

setts within a short distance of a main sett, there could have been other sett entrances in the area that had been cleared after the initial survey. Indeed, whilst one cannot categorically state that setts have been destroyed without knowing what was there before, there is one spot which had features suggesting that a sett entrance may have been there, which I have marked with an X.

A common issue is the playing down of the importance of any finds on a site when planning is sought. In the present case the consultant claims that Sett **B** is very active and activity at the Sett **A** on-site is insignificant in comparison, even though entrances for each sett have been missed. However to my trained eye the onsite Sett **A** seemed more active than Sett **B** and hence Sett **A** could be the more important of the two,

although careful observation and bait-marking would be needed to positively identify how the setts were being utilised by the badger clan.

We now have evidence from two incidences that this consultant is in serious breach of the codes of practice of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and we are pursuing a complaint to the highest level in the Institute. Feedback suggests that other similar complaints have been received.

Demo outside the High Court

Nigel Mee

ON A SUMMER'S DAY in the London Law Court a judge listened to arguments for and against the legality of the forthcoming second year of a six-week cull programme in Gloucestershire and Devon, brought by the Badger Trust. Our Dave Williams sat inside the whole day with other members of WSBG, the Badger Trust and various supporters for no cull on one side of the court, and their opposition on the other. Outside meanwhile a lively, vocal and tireless group of around 100 souls spent the day demonstrating to anyone who took notice that they did not want any cull of any badger anywhere.

This wasn't one of the official Badger Army round-the-country anti-cull demonstrations but there were many familiar faces from those marches there. No marching on this day though. It was a case of standing in one place, at the public entrance to the Law Courts, and keeping up a continuous barrage to the passing world of how they felt about what

was being considered. Save our Badgers! Stop the Cull! Vaccinate not Exterminate! Cure not Kill!

There was chanting, the holding up of signs, human-sized badgers, drums – anything to get attention, which it certainly did. It never let up for the whole day. As the double-decker tour buses passed slowly by in the London traffic gridlock, people on board rushed to our side of the bus to marvel and take photos of us. As bus after bus pass by and a constant wall of cameras point at you there is a feeling of momentary celebrity, so we took it – yes, a chance to show how we really feel. I don't doubt there'll have been a few chuckles at those crazy eccentric English back in Japan when the holiday photos get shown.

This was an impressive display by a dedicated few. At times it looked and sounded like there were a thousand people there. There weren't, it was just a magical trick done by the absolute sincerity and sheer depth of passion felt by all who demonstrated there that day. Check out the videos on YouTube.



FOR EMERGENCIES CALL:

Your local Police Station / 999

Surrey Police Wildlife Crime Officer 0845 125 2222

Wildlife Aid, Leatherhead 0906 1800132

(website www.wildlifeaid.org.uk)

RSPCA 0300 1234 999

Member of WSBG Committee

NEIGHBOURING BADGER GROUPS

East Surrey 0208 660 9827

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 March 24

Dave Williams

As well as the prime mover of WSBG, Dave is Mammal Officer at **Surrey Wildlife Trust**. He has just completed a 4-year project on Harvest Mice – fascinating and very attractive animals, and our smallest rodents. Dave's presentation will cover their ecology and lifestyle and the results of the project.

Tuesday April 21

Glen Skelton

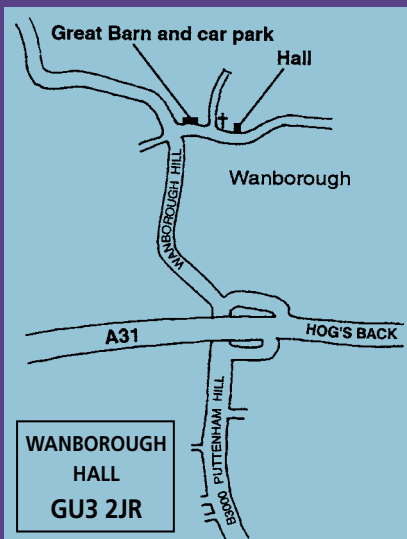
Glen is Riverwatch Officer with **Surrey Wildlife Trust**. Riverwatch is training a network of volunteers across Surrey to monitor river health by carrying out seasonal surveys of a stretch of river. Results will be used to provide evidence to address deficiencies such as pollution, barriers to fish passage and invasive non-native species. The scheme has been in operation for a year, so Glen will report on its progress.

Tuesday May 12

AGM and guest speaker

starting at 7.30pm

We will have a short AGM with reports, when you can have your say and ask questions. Then after refreshments there will be a guest speaker.



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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