



WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

An artistic illustration of two badgers standing in a grassy field. They are looking up at a wooden building with a sign that says "POLLING STATION" with an arrow pointing left. In the background, there is a landscape with a river and a church spire under a sunset sky.

POLLING
STATION
←

*"Wish we
could vote"*

NEWSLETTER 71 APRIL 2015

News and reports

A garden full of holes Badger Trust update

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

"Wish we could vote"

by Pat Williams

.....

Welcome to our new members

Eileen Amore
Suzanne Arnold
Jane Harry
Maureen Price

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Martin D'Arcy

As you are all no doubt too aware, there is an election looming. This time the outcome will almost certainly have serious implications for badgers. I would urge all members, should the opportunity arise, to quiz their prospective MPs about their party's policy towards badgers. I would also ask that you leave them in no doubt what your views are on the cull and how this might influence your vote. We do live in a democracy and, as our representatives, MPs ought to know what we think and how strongly we feel about such issues. If enough of us let them know then it might have a real effect. We can only hope!

As the days lengthen and sun warms, spring begins to make itself apparent. Below ground the badger cubs are growing fast and before long will make their first timid forays up to the surface. If the cull continues, or worse, expands, then many face a bleak future. This is our country and these animals are our responsibility. We can resign ourselves to what happens with a shrug and a feeling of powerlessness, or we can take a stand. We have voices and have every right to be heard. Let's make some noise and ensure a safer, healthier and more caring world for all of us, badgers included!

I wear two hats as an active member of the West Surrey Badger Group. I am both Chairman and a Field Officer. As those of you who attended the Workshop on March 14th discovered, a Field Officer can face a variety of tasks. We are givers of advice, builders of fences, installers of badger gates, rescuers of injured badgers, surveyors of setts, badger detectives and scene of crime investigators.

Most people have never seen a badger and have no idea that here in Surrey many of us live alongside them, oblivious. Often our call-outs involve us in introducing our fellow citizens to this parallel twilight world populated by these rarely glimpsed, independent, yet engaging creatures.

It's a privilege to enter their world but also a responsibility.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the West Surrey Badger Group will take place on Tuesday 12th May 2015, at 7.30pm in Wanborough Hall

A G E N D A

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) Presentation and acceptance of 2014 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. John Whitaker, Pat Williams and Peter Eggleton will be standing down as per the constitution. These and the other Committee members are willing to stand again. New Committee members are needed.
- 8) A.O.B.

Please note the earlier starting time as our short AGM will be followed by refreshments, quizzes, a raffle and a presentation from Alan Seymour of some of his recent excellent wildlife photos.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Nigel Mee

These last few winter months have been a quiet time for West Surrey Badger Group and its financial transactions have been the same, so not much to report since the January newsletter.

The Royal Mail was paid £313 for its annual PO Box service which is after another above-inflation price increase. If there were an alternative similar cheaper service it would be considered by the Committee, but it seems the Royal Mail service is unique and we're therefore rather stuck with their fees.

Income from data search fees has increased considerably in recent months and

this year has reached £1,230 received, with over £1,000 still to be paid to us by users of the service. Last year the same service brought in £1,300, so there's a very good chance that 2014-15 will see this figure surpassed.

The financial year ends on 31st March and the accounts will as usual be prepared and published by Sue Havell ready for presentation to the members at the charity's AGM in Wanborough Village Hall on Tuesday 12th May.

I do hope all our members have an enjoyable spring time period.

BASIL AND MORRIS

by Martin D'Arcy, who in his additional role as Field Officer has recently been involved in these two interesting cases



BASIL had gone down a hole suspected to be a badger sett entrance. The owner called our help line to say that her two miniature dachshunds, Basil and Boris, had disappeared down the hole, but only Boris had returned. This had happened the previous afternoon and although they had been back and called and searched, there was no sign of Basil. She planned to phone around all the local vets and rescue centres in case someone had found him, and wanted our help in verifying whether the hole was a badger sett and if it were active.

I met her and together we inspected the scene of the disappearance. There was no doubt it was a badger sett and clear signs that it was active. Touchingly, Basil's blanket had been placed by the entrance in the hope that this might entice him out.

Once it's established that an active sett is involved, it's necessary to ensure that the correct procedure is followed. As we all know, badgers are protected, and a sett cannot be disturbed without a licence from Natural England. (We have had a case where over-anxious owners and over-enthusiastic fire-fighters dug into a sett without permission or expert supervision and thus broke the law and seriously damaged the sett.) I gave the

owner the Natural England phone number and explained that she would need to contact them to get a licence to take any action.

I suggested that it would be necessary to try to locate exactly where Basil was as the sett could spread in any direction and might be quite extensive, with many tunnels and chambers. This can be done by using cameras or listening devices, and I recommended contacting the RSPCA who might be able to help source something suitable. I also asked to be told what transpired, and said I would be happy to help further, and incidentally keep an eye on the sett and its occupants.

As I drove away I felt very sorry for Basil and his owner, and not a little concerned as to what might happen. I had assured the owner that this sort of mishap was not infrequent, and in many previous cases the dog had come out after a few days none the worse for its adventure underground. I hoped this was not just wishful thinking.

The following day I received a phone call from the owner. All her neighbours had been made aware that Basil was missing, and flyers on the footpath signposts alerted other dog walkers. One of these had been walking her dog that morning and had passed the

sett entrance where she saw Basil sitting on his blanket! He looked rather dirty and bedraggled as you would expect after three days underground. After a quick check-over by the vet he was found to be a bit dehydrated but otherwise fine.

The lesson for all of us is clear. Should a dog disappear down a badger sett the most important thing is not to panic and to be patient. In most cases the dog will come out by itself, but it might take a few days. Basil had a very sensible owner who took all the right

steps and the result was a happy reunion, and no damage to the sett or its badgers.

Basil's escapade was reported in the *Surrey Advertiser* and the *Daily Mirror*. In both articles it was mentioned that the owner had called West Surrey Badger Group, and she was quoted as saying: "A lovely guy called Dave Williams came out and looked". Dave was away in New Zealand at the time, and undoubtedly lovely though he is, his many talents don't yet extend to being in two places at once!



MORRIS is an unusually active and adventurous tortoise who has a yen to see the world beyond his garden home. As a result his owner carefully lined her garden hedge with wire netting to prevent him escaping. She called us because she had noticed a hole in the netting and had been told by neighbours that there were badgers in the vicinity. She was worried that the badgers would make holes through which Morris might make a bid for freedom.

She explained that although Morris was currently hibernating in a hole he had dug for himself, he would soon be emerging as the days warmed and lengthened.

I went over to check and found some evidence of badger activity – there was a badger path nearby and some signs of foraging. It was not obvious whether the hole had been made by badgers, however, nor whether they were regular visitors. I set up one of our trail cameras, which are triggered by movement and use Infrared light to video

in the dark, which is the best way of telling if badgers are involved.

Two days later I was told that Morris had emerged. I suggested that the hole in the fence be blocked sufficiently to stop a tortoise, but not a badger. This is simple, as badgers are powerful and surprisingly agile, and can push through, dig under or climb over most obstacles. If the gap was subsequently used by badgers, it would be immediately obvious.

If we found badgers were involved, we would introduce an obstacle that badgers can easily overcome, but that even the most mobile tortoise cannot get past.

Morris has lived in this garden for about 30 years, so it seems unlikely that he has not encountered badgers at some point – it would be fascinating to observe such a meeting.

When we checked some time later, the camera had only picked up a fox using the gap but no badgers. The owner has now blocked the hole.

PLANNING REPORT

Rodger Munt for Dave Williams

I have been recently involved with seven planning applications that have been submitted to Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC), which are listed below.

Camberley (4 sites)

1. I was invited by the SHBC planning officer to survey a site in **Heatherside** where there is a development application for 100 homes. I found two setts on site, that I judged to be outliers of a nearby main sett, and the developer is now drawing up mitigation plans.

2. At a development site in **Upper Chobham Road**, where I found a well-used main sett of 9 entrances even though the consultant had said there was no suitable badger habitat (see Newsletter 70), the plans have now been altered to avoid interference with the sett. We have responded with no objection to the new plans.

3. Planning applications to extend a club's sports facilities onto a recreational ground (RG) containing several badger setts have been ongoing since 2010. We discovered that the main sett within the site was destroyed by illegal digging in 2013, a crime which was recorded by the police, and several new 1- or 2-entrance setts were created by the surviving badgers in response to the loss. The most active of these is in the middle of the area proposed for a new car park in a planning application submitted in late 2014.

The consultant argues that, although this sett has been active

during the winter on each of their three brief visits, this is of no significance and can be closed as a matter of routine as the new main sett must be at some other "unknown" location. We have thoroughly surveyed the surrounding area and only found setts on the RG. We pointed out that as the RG is constrained by topographical boundaries it is likely to mimic an urban environment where one often finds main setts of only 2 or 3 entrances on a small clan territory.

We have expressed concern about the potential further distress caused to the badger clan of destroying a sett, without fully establishing its role, when badgers have already suffered from the effects of illegal digging.

4. Planning was approved four years ago for new houses on a site near **Crawley Hill** where an artificial sett was provided to compensate for the closure of three setts. We have alerted the authorities to the fact that the artificial sett is not being used and instead the badger clan has recently produced a new and very active sett on part of the site where clearance work appears imminent.



www.wildlifemaging.co.uk

Frimley

Plans have been submitted to extend a car park in Frimley into an area where the supporting ecological report failed to make an assessment of badgers. My survey found a badger sett on site which has now been corroborated by another ecologist. I have recommended adjusting the car park layout to avoid disturbance to the sett.

Mytchett

Plans were approved in 2014 by SHBC for new industrial buildings on a factory site adjacent to the Special Protection Area (for birds) of Ash Ranges, without an appropriate ecological assessment of badgers, even though this had been highlighted as necessary by Surrey Wildlife Trust. Had SHBC or the developer consulted WSBG, we could have advised them about several badger setts that are within 100 metres of the site boundary.

Although we have not been permitted onto the site, we can see there is suitable habitat for badger setts within the site boundary and evidence of badger runs into the site and foraging activity. The head of SHBC regulation has apologised for the omission and has now included a condition on the developer for a full badger assessment to be made in advance of building works.

Deepcut

A new village of 1,200 houses is planned to replace the Princess Royal Barracks at Deepcut. The main development will start



www.independent.co.uk

when the army moves out in 2017/18 but phase 1 of the development, consisting of 100 homes, is planned to commence this summer.

We have expressed concern that there are several setts, with a total of 32 entrances, on the site planned for the phase 1 work that have not been mentioned in the ecologist's surveys, and indeed no application has been received by Natural England to mitigate for the presence of these setts.

We have also informed the authorities that there are a further 18 known setts, of various sizes, which are not mentioned in the ecology reports for the site, that are likely to be affected by the later phases of the development.



www.wildlifetrusts.org



Closure of sett entrances in a Frimley garden

Rodger Munt

One of the main functions of West Surrey Badger Group is to provide advice and assistance on badger nuisance in gardens. In the summer of 2014 we received a call from a very worried home owner in Frimley when 6 holes with very large spoil heaps had appeared across the full width of the steeply sloping rear garden of a house he had recently purchased. These holes were preventing safe access to the lower part of his garden, to the lake which was an important feature of the property and, more worryingly, the entrances were getting closer to the house.

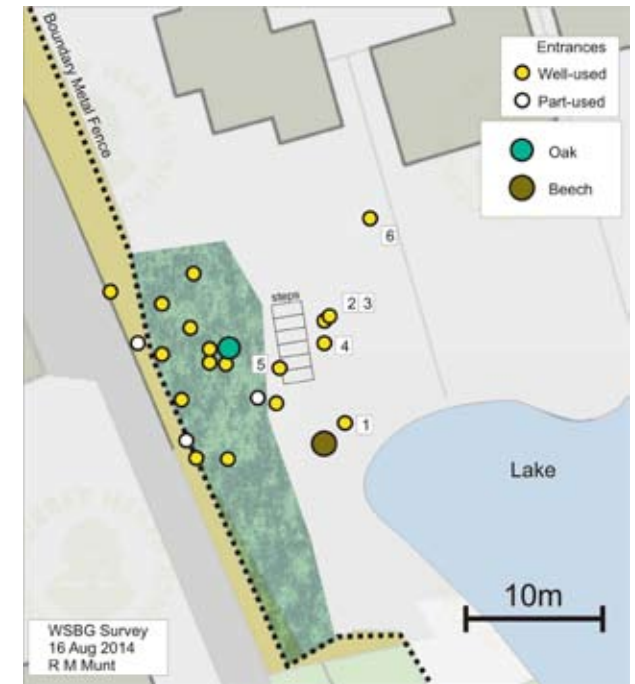
A visit quickly confirmed that all 6 holes were active badger sett entrances

related to a main sett of 15 entrances in a copse adjacent to the property. This sett had been protected by WSBG, as a planning condition, when the housing estate was built over 20 years ago.

It was clear that all these new entrances were connected by tunnels to the main part of the sett and that simply closing the 6 entrances would not be sufficient to discourage the badgers from further tunnelling in the lawn. We suggested the problem could be resolved by isolating the lawn area from the wooded area by introducing a very deep underground barrier of 25m in length. This presented a significant component of the closure process accepted by the home owner.

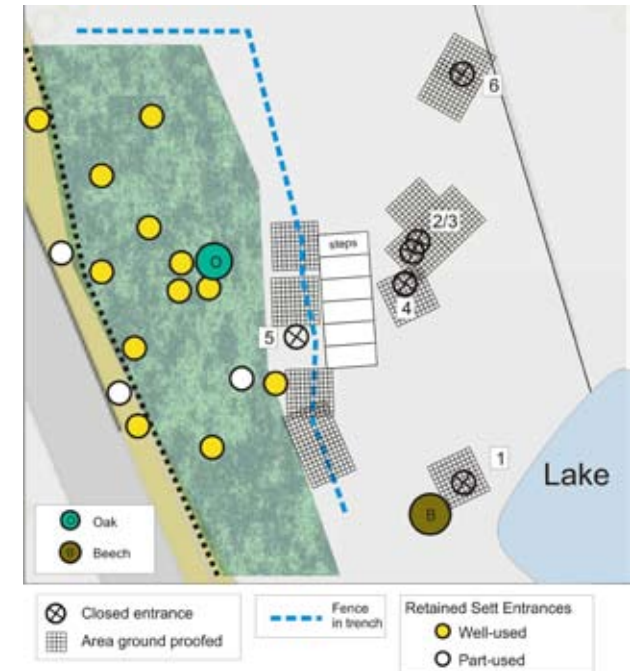
As this involved digging through the active tunnels we were not prepared to allow the work to be undertaken by an unknown contractor (note the botched closure reported by Peter in our January 2015 newsletter, when badgers were trapped underground by a contractor who had no respect for their welfare). We insisted on managing the closure process and employing Warwick, of Warwick Reynolds Associates, who is a well-respected consultant with many years experience of badgers and badger sett closures. (continued overleaf)

Below: Warwick Reynolds during the digging of the 2-metre deep trench



Above: Diagram of original sett entrances

Below: Diagram showing closed and proofed entrances





Warwick Reynolds and Dave Smith closing sett entrances 2 and 3

The 6 sett entrances were closed under Natural England licence in two phases:

- **Phase 1:** A 2m deep trench, of 25m in length, was dug to isolate the new entrances from the original sett entrances. The separation was secured using 1.8m high heavy duty galvanised chain-link fencing installed vertically in the trench. Seven tunnels were gently intersected in this process and thoroughly inspected to determine whether they were directly connected to an open entrance. Escape ramps for the badgers were inserted, to connect the intersected tunnels to the surface, before backfilling the trench.

- **Phase 2:** One-way gates were installed on the 6 entrances and at the top of the escape ramps. The gates were monitored daily during an exclusion period of 21 days to check for badger activity and potential problems, before finally closing the sett entrances and proofing the ground to discourage further excavations by badgers. WSBG member Dave Smith assisted both me and Warwick in the final closure and proofing process.

This closure was successfully completed in November 2014 and subsequent monitoring has shown that the badger clan is still using the original part of the sett and has not attempted further tunnelling excursions in the lawn area.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

West Surrey Badger Group membership subscriptions are due on 1st April 2015.

Please ignore this reminder if you pay by standing order, as fees are automatically deducted in April. For all other members there should be a membership renewal form enclosed with this newsletter and payment can be accepted by direct transfer over the internet, or by cheque made out to West Surrey Badger Group and sent to the Membership Secretary.

Fees are:

Single and Family £10.00

Senior citizens and unwaged members £7.00

Under 18s £5.00

If paying by direct transfer please use your membership number as reference and advise the Membership Secretary of the transfer.

The Seven-Year Itch

RESIGNATION OF MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

This is the end of my seventh year as **Membership Secretary** and I feel it is time to **step back from the post. As you may gather from my recent newsletter submissions, I have been heavily involved in fighting the badger's corner on planning applications, and may have failed to devote as much time as I should to WSBG members. However, I am delighted to report that Susan Clee is taking over from April 2015.**

My investigations have brought me into frequent conflict with some consultants who are in clear breach of professional codes of practice, having provided inaccurate and misleading assessments of badger activity to planning authorities. Both the planning authorities and Natural England presume the information supplied is accurate and it sometimes takes considerable effort to convince them otherwise. It appears to be a never-ending battle, but the effort has

resulted in:

- a)** an apology from the head of local authority regulation for not insisting on a badger survey in one critical case,
- b)** WSBG now being included on the consultee list,
- c)** being recognised as providing accurate and unbiased badger assessments and
- d)** getting plans amended and mitigation in place to avoid setts and to protect badgers, when consultants have said setts didn't exist or were not important.

I should emphasise that there are many exemplary ecologists out there and that only a few are unreliable.

It has been a privilege to work as Membership Secretary and I thank you all for your support. I shall continue to work in the background on other WSBG matters.

Rodger Munt

Badger Workshop

Peter Eggleton

We managed to hold a badger workshop this March, which attracted 12 members and a couple of "old hands".

Dave's presentation included all you need to know about the badger: its home, its family social structure and its biology. He covered all the signs to look for when you're out in the field: what a sett looks like and how to see if it's active. He summarised the legal protection afforded to badgers and their setts, and showed examples of persecution and snaring which we occasionally have to deal with.

I then gave a brief introduction to our sett record system, a summary of dealing with sick or injured badgers, followed by more examples of incidents that we get involved with and general pictures of some interesting badger behaviour (including a piece of film taken by one of our Farnham members showing a badger sleeping out under the stars in a nest

above ground in the middle of March!).

After lunch we visited an active sett not too far away, where everyone was able to explore all the holes. Several holes showed signs of recent digging by the badgers, pathways and footprints were in evidence, and a few hairs were found. Unfortunately dung pits evaded us. Whilst there we reviewed and corrected the details on our sett record sheet, and recorded the signs of use.

I am keen to arrange a few sett checking days where in small groups we can visit some of the setts that haven't been checked for many years. Anyone interested to join in could let me know (peter@plustrue.freeseerve.co.uk or 01428 607731) and we will sort out some dates and places to go.

Future workshops could be arranged for anyone who missed out on the last one. Let us know.



Dave Williams

BADGER TRUST REPORT

Dave Williams

Just as Britain faces a General Election, it is as well to assess where we are in relation to the proposed badger cull. We have seen three debates in Parliament and a series of legal actions taken up by the Badger Trust. The legal challenges have been extremely expensive, involving the highest courts in the land, top lawyers and leading counsel. Nevertheless the Badger Trust is confident these battles are essential to influence the policy of one of the most powerful governments in the world, in defence of the welfare of a supposedly protected species.

Although the statutory killing of badgers is continuing as a result of cynical perversions of science, it could, of course have been far worse if the 'roll out' — eight more culling areas, then 10 times per year for the next eight years — had been established. Each would have lasted four years at unimaginable cost to the badger population. Gratifying though the abandonment of the roll-out was, increased killing could easily return for no doubt contrived justifications.

After repeated applications to the courts the Trust finally lost its attempt to mitigate the culling by the only sure-fire means available, a successful judicial review. This would have forced the Government to employ independent expert monitors to check for humaneness, effectiveness and safety. It is extraordinary that the Government went to such lengths to avoid having any independent scrutiny.

One must wonder why. What are they hiding?

Further legal action by the Trust currently seeks to expose the secret dealings between Defra and the National Farmers' Union when considering the culling process. "Risk and Issue Logs" were produced by a TB Badger Control Project Board on which — unknown to both the public and even the farming industry at the time — the NFU had been invited to participate. The Trust contends that the NFU is only a private lobby group.

Both these actions have involved repeated applications to and hearings in the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Upper Tribunal at the Royal Courts of Justice. The latter agreed with the Trust and the Information Commissioner that DEFRA was unlawfully withholding the documents. But the battle is not over yet. We now await the detailed judgement about the public interest test, against which Defra could appeal. Consequently the Trust still does not have the documents but is closer than it has ever been.

Furthermore it was left open how exceptions relied on by DEFRA - internal communications and confidential proceedings — were to be understood in other similar cases. It must be remembered though that these legal actions can only concern narrow interpretation of the law, our only recourse. The courts have no power to adjudicate on science. As

Chris Williamson, MP for Derby North said, opening the most recent Commons debate, "Ministers are behaving somehow as if they were the parliamentary wing of the National Farmers' Union" and were behaving like three wise monkeys.

Badger Trust recently had a meeting with Secretary of State for the Environment, Liz Truss. At the short meeting, which took nearly 6 months to arrange, it was clear that she did not have a full understanding of the scientific evidence surrounding the cull. She insisted that she received advice from experts – the Government's own Chief Scientific Officer, and Chief Veterinary Officer. She did however sympathise with our request for more action against badger persecution and wildlife crime, although to date we have not seen any statement from her or the Government. Meanwhile Labour have committed in their manifesto to abandon the badger cull and not re-instate hunting with dogs. They have pledged to put wildlife crime high on their agenda.

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I am sure that most of you know that I am Chairman of the Badger Trust. However, after ten years in the post I shall be standing down. Here is the message sent to Badger Groups and Badger Trust supporters:

After ten challenging but fulfilling years as Chairman of Badger Trust, I will be standing down as we have found a director who is suitable and willing to

take over from me. I have said for several years that we need a younger person with fresh ideas.

Peter Martin was co-opted as a new Board member in January. He is a member of the Gloucestershire Badger Group and is already known to us from his participation in peaceful anti-cull campaigning activities and has spoken at many of the Badger Army marches. Peter has excellent credentials, including working with the media, editorial experience and several years as a local councillor giving him substantial knowledge of planning and development including experience of committee work.

I proposed Peter at the Board Meeting held on 28th February 2015, and he was unanimously voted in to be the new Chairman of Badger Trust. I will be pleased to hand the reins over to him at this year's AGM where I will wish him much success in this influential role. Peter will work closely with our CEO, Dominic Dyer, to ensure that the governance of Badger Trust continues to be correctly administered and that the charity remains a force to be reckoned with in all aspects of badger conservation.

I shall continue as a Trustee/Director of Badger Trust, assisting Peter during his settling in period. I hope to see many of you at the forthcoming AGM and look forward to working with you in the future.

*Regards,
Dave Williams,*

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 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 April 21

Glen Skelton

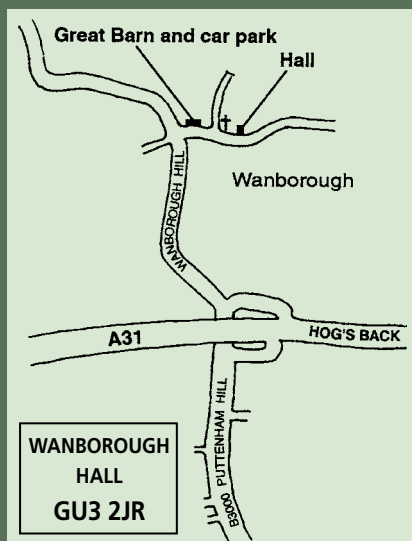
Glen is RiverSearch Officer with **Surrey Wildlife Trust**. RiverSearch is training a network of volunteers across Surrey to monitor river health by carrying out seasonal surveys of a stretch of river. Results will be used to provide evidence to address deficiencies such as pollution, barriers to fish 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

starting at 7.30pm

We will have a short AGM with reports, when you can have your say and ask questions. Then after refreshments, quizzes and a raffle, there will be a presentation by **Alan Seymour** of some of his recent excellent wildlife photographs.



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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