



WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP



NEWSLETTER 73 JANUARY 2016

Badger Release Project update Badger Day Walk
Sett checking New badger book published 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

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COVER PICTURE

by Pat Williams

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WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Susan Atkinson
Charlotte Druce
Jo Robinson

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Martin D'Arcy

I have three important messages for you all:

WHERE TO SHOP IN JANUARY

Waitrose in Godalming has chosen West Surrey Badger Group as one of the three charities it will support in the month of January. Every time you shop there, you will be given green tokens, which you then place in one of the three charities' boxes. Waitrose will give each charity a monetary donation for each token given.

TREASURER WANTED

Nigel, our long-standing treasurer, is retiring from the post in April 2016. We are looking for someone to take over this important role. If you have some accounting experience and think you can help please contact me, by email or telephone, for more details. My details are on page 15.

HELP!

We have quite a few calls about badgers in gardens, under sheds, raking lawns, digging holes, breaking fences, and even some saying how pleased they are that they have badgers visiting. A lot of these calls come when Dave is virtually answering them on his own – Sue and I are at work, Peter is often in Crete and Rodger has had a very debilitating back injury. Dave has managed to deal with them all, but I mention this in the hope that we can attract volunteers to assist us with these calls, including badger rescues.

We supply all equipment and training, and can reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses, such as travel. Please contact Dave or me if you are interested. Our details are on page 15.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Nigel Mee

Since the last newsletter there has been expenditure for a new laptop of £567 with an additional £208 paid for software and setting up, tree survey work at Ruxley amounting to £275, and a deposit of £262 paid on a new storage shed for housing stock and equipment.

This expenditure was all necessary because (a) the old computer being used by the charity was well past its sell-by date – a case of “technology waits for no man” perhaps?, (b) the trees at the land owned by the charity at Ruxley, in Claygate, continue to be an expensive responsibility, and (c) the old shed housing boxes of stock and pamphlets, stall paraphernalia, and equipment generally, was about to fall down! The new shed will cost in the region of £1,200 and is expected to last for decades.

As we move into the final quarter of the

financial year income and expenditure have been very similar to previous years. Income to date is £6,116 and expenditure £5,872. The funds held in the charity's bank account remain high and the financial situation for going forward is strong.

The land at Ruxley continues to be a concern for the committee. At the time of writing in 2015 costs have amounted to £2,015, with further necessary expenditure coming up for making some of the very tall trees safe. When this land was first given to the charity a fund was set up of £10k for maintenance of the site in the future. Whilst there is still £3,844 left in the fund, the committee is very aware that the financial burden of many of the large trees on site needs to be reduced.

I hope everyone had an enjoyable festive season and wish you all a trouble-free 2016.

FIELD OFFICER'S REPORT

Dave Williams

Injured badger leads to suspicious behaviour report

I was phoned just after lunch. Could I assist and collect an injured badger in the Farncombe area.

Fortunately I was able to go straight away. I arranged to meet a young lady who had found the injured badger, which was still breathing but not moving much. We met nearby and walked to where the badger was lying, and I could see it was in a very poor state. I brought over the cage and together we pushed it into the cage and carried it to my car. I then drove to Wildlife Aid.

On arrival a quick examination revealed serious internal and head injuries, which

meant that it had to be euthanised. When I arrived home there was a message on our answerphone, asking me to call a lady who happened to have phoned me several days before about badgers in the next door garden.

I rang her and she told me that her neighbour had seen something suspicious – a young girl waiting on the track, and then an elderly man came and it looked as though they had a badger in a cage. They put the cage in a car and the man drove off with it...

Despite being upset at being called elderly, although I suppose I am, I was pleased that the affair had been reported, as it may well have been a serious incident to be investigated.

The Aldershot badger

An injured badger was delivered to Wildlife Aid with some injuries but none serious. It was delivered by an RSPCA officer with only



"This time he seemed more interested and pushed his nose out."

the name of the road and town in which it was found, but no indication of where in the road. The town was Aldershot, not known for lots of badger habitat.

I visited and found the road, which fortunately was not a long road, but there were several options as a possible release site. We had no records of setts in the area.

Martin collected the badger from Wildlife Aid, and together we went to the road just after dark. We chose the most likely place, a small piece of woodland which led to more woodland behind some empty army buildings. We entered the woodland with the badger, hoping that he would show some signs of knowing where it was. However, when we opened the door he refused to leave, despite us trying to encourage him.

We decided to go further into the wood, another 30 metres. This time he seemed more interested and pushed his nose out, then he suddenly ran out for a few metres and did a sharp turn to the right as if he knew where he was. We only hope he found the rest of his family at the sett.

OUR BADGER DAY WALK

This year we decided that we would do another sponsored walk to celebrate National Badger Day, and raise funds for the Badger Trust. Our chosen route this year was from the Chancies, Guildford, along the North Downs Way to Newlands Corner, then returning on a slightly different route. We passed several badger setts that we looked at.

A group of nine set out from the Chancies car park at 10 o'clock on Sunday October 5th. It was a very nice morning, dry and sunny. We walked along the North Downs Way and went up the slopes of the Chancies woods to check the ancient setts. We also passed

by the sett that was dug out three years ago by the Fire Service to rescue two dogs; unfortunately, despite our best efforts to repair this sett, it now seems to have been abandoned.

We continued and found very fresh dungpits, although none of the setts

we saw showed very much activity. We arrived at a very busy Newlands Corner, where we had lunch and a welcome drink.

After a break we set off on our return journey, going past St Martha's church. We stopped not just to admire the view, but to marvel at the building at the top of the hill and wonder how they managed to build the church and haul all the materials up there without modern machinery.

We arrived safely back at our starting point, everyone seeming in good condition and having enjoyed a good day out, and all for a good cause.

Thanks to all who took part – Alex, Martin, Tiffany, Isobel, Hannah, Nicky, Sue, plus Arthur and his Dad – and thanks also to those members who sent



What a handy way to celebrate National Badger Day! These are Alex's nails

in donations. Although not all of the sponsor money has been collected we will have over £500 to donate to the Badger Trust.



DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

by Martin D'Arcy

REAKTION BOOKS have started publishing a series of natural history books each titled the name of an animal, that covers the eponymous creature from a range of perspectives. There is some discussion of the ecology and behaviour of the animal, but also how it has been viewed and treated by people, and how it has featured in our literature, art and culture. I have just finished reading the book entitled *Badger*, by Daniel Heath Justice.

The author is a Canadian citizen of the Cherokee nation, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Literature and Expressive Culture at the University of British Columbia. As well as a learned and literary man, he is clearly a badger enthusiast and has a website dedicated to them called "The Badger Files".

The book covers all the various species of badger (Eurasian, American, Honey, and Hog) and is both informative and interesting. While familiar with the biology of our species (*Meles meles*), and the Ratel or Honey badger (*Mellivora capensis*) I knew very little about the American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) which looks rather like the creature we know so well, but has a quite different lifestyle. Where ours is a woodland animal that lives in social groups with a wide-ranging omnivorous diet, the more solitary American badger lives on the plains and in deserts and largely feeds on small rodents such as prairie dogs. It has been described

thus, "as if someone took a half-grown European badger and then beat it until it was flat and broad."

The book is full of fascinating stories and surprising facts. Did you know that the Tesco coat of arms (who knew they even had one) contains no fewer than three Eurasian badgers? Or that President Theodore Roosevelt had a pet American badger called Josiah (not to mention a bear called Jonathan Edwards)? Or that the Cherokee for badger is Uguna, while the Navajo say Nahashch'id?



Tesco's coat of arms – you could be forgiven for thinking they trade in badgers

The book covers the badger in literature and starts with the most famous, Badger in *Wind in the Willows*, described as being "at once a woodland wise man, a suitably shabby bourgeois gentleman ... a loyal companion and a skilled fighter".

There is mention of a favourite of mine, the Narnian badger, Trufflehunter, from C S Lewis' book, *Prince Caspian*.

Badgers often symbolise tradition, steadfastness and loyalty. They have been seen by indigenous cultures as a link between the world of the living and the underworld of the dead. More recently, there has been a fascination with the ferocity and fearlessness of the Honey badger, which has generated numerous YouTube videos, cartoons and even t-shirts.

The history of human/badger interaction is a long and complicated one. While assigned positive characteristics in stories, they have often been derided as vermin and mistreated. This ambiguity continues today. Many people are fond of badgers: they have been polled as our joint second favourite mammal, and their image is used by many organisations, including the Wildlife Trusts, as a symbol of nature in general, and wild animals in particular. Yet we continue to persecute them, and blame them for problems which have

arisen through our own negligence.

Often people profess to a fondness for badgers until they appear in their garden and dig holes in the lawn, whereupon they are treated as invasive pests. As if the badger was being wilfully destructive and targeting them personally, rather than simply looking for food (not having a convenient supermarket available) and with most of their foraging areas now built on or fenced off.

I look forward to the day we learn to respect other life forms, and appreciate that we are as much part of nature, and as dependent on it for the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat as all the creatures who share this miraculous planet with us. There is room for all, and because life is a complex system made up of all the myriad of different plants, animals and microbes that occupy our world, there is a need for all to keep the whole healthy.

Let us hope for a more enlightened, compassionate and loving world in 2016.

At the Badger Trust Conference, presenting a badger painting (by our own Pat Williams) to Dr Pam Mynott, to acknowledge her valuable contribution to the Badger Trust over the years. With Pam is Dominic Dyer, CEO Badger Trust, and Dave Williams, former chairman who has worked with Pam for many years.





SETT CHECKING at the Badger Release Project site

Alex Learmont

ON A BEAUTIFULLY crisp late November morning, we stepped out of our cars and breathed in the cool fresh autumn air. The quiet groan of the A3 could be heard in the background but the sun was out and the old (and now very pleasant) A3 route was beckoning. A group of 14 strong, we marched towards the first of several setts we were planning on visiting that day. These, however, are no ordinary setts since they are the ones featured in the Badger Release Project of 2013. Peter wrote comprehensively about this for us the following year, and there have been several updates since then. Read the latest one, by Nigel, on page 10. The project had yielded some

fascinating results, including the fact that the cubs quickly abandoned their artificial sett in favour of existing empty ones in the area, and they did not stay together as a whole group.

Down to business

With that background information under our belts, we proceeded to climb down a leaf-littered slope to our first sett of the day. This essentially consisted of three holes which did not appear to have been used recently. Undeterred, we followed the old road up to another steep slope where, hidden under a mass of dead bracken, we found the artificial sett where the cubs were originally released. Two or three black pipes were visible, along with a number

of other holes that were dug by the badgers themselves. However, it seems the badgers are still using other badger-made setts in preference to our man-made one as there was no evidence of recent activity at the sett.

Next, we fought our way through the undergrowth to a ring of amber-coloured larch trees perched on a hill. We were pleased to see a large and active sett nestled among the pine needles with fresh spoil, hairs and several dung pits visible. Here (after wrestling with several branches) Dave managed to put up a camera facing one of the main entrances which we would later find revealed lots of activity.

Into the Punchbowl

Then our troop split in two and both groups meandered down towards the beautiful Devil's Punchbowl. As we descended, we stopped to look at a number of smaller setts, including one outlier almost completely obscured by bracken.

Our two groups reconvened at a really spectacular sett on another wooded slope looking out to fields and

woodlands on the other side of the Punchbowl. We all split off, chattering like excited schoolchildren, finding holes, paths, dung pits and spoil heaps the size of wheelbarrows!

One really impressive spoil heap caught our attention which, on closer inspection, contained large clumps of hair and even a few bones. Badgers will often return to the sett to die and other badgers will even block up a chamber underground containing the body. Eventually the chamber is unearthed and subject to a good spring-clean, which results in the remains being pushed out into the open. Again with such obvious activity we set up a camera with the hope of catching the badgers on film.

From here we pushed on to our final stop at 'Nigel's' sett. The walk took us past a beautiful woodland brook and ancient yew trees, and we even spotted (or rather heard) a raven cruising over the heathland. Finally we reached a last (and rather steep) climb to the sett. The wheezing and puffing were not in vain though, and we were rewarded with plenty of signs of activity



including snuffle holes (where badgers poke their noses into undergrowth and soil in search of food), areas that had been 'raked' of dead leaves to be dragged down into the sett for bedding, and an almighty dung pit next to the main entrance.

One of the entrances to the artificial sett where five badger cubs were released in 2013

The day ended with a very welcome bowl of chips and hot chocolate in a nearby pub.

The cameras' revelations

The next day the cameras were recovered and we were pleased to find they had captured lots of wonderful badger behaviour. The camera filming the sett in the larch trees was particularly fruitful, with clear footage showing one plump badger doing an awful lot of scratching and yawning before meeting a second badger and spending some time grooming each other. The camera at the sett with the large spoil heap again picked up at least two badgers poking their heads out of the main entrance. None of the badgers were wearing radio collars although we would have expected these to have fallen off by now anyway. It's highly likely that at least some of the badgers are the original cubs released in 2013. All in all we had a fantastic sett-



7.45pm, 28 November 2015 – outside the sett in the larch trees

checking day, learning how to spot the tell-tale signs of badgers and getting a chance to meet other members of the group. But more than that, our trip has confirmed that at least some of the badger cubs released here over two years ago are still here and healthy, which just goes to show that such release projects are wholly worthwhile.

BADGER RELEASE PROJECT UPDATE

Nigel Mee

MANY MEMBERS will be familiar with West Surrey Badger Group's involvement in the RSPCA release of five young badgers wearing radio collars on a National Trust site in West Surrey in July 2013. This article is the fourth update in our newsletters.

After the batteries to the radio collars had lost power and signals ceased in April 2014, we had to resort to using trail cameras or visual watch to look for badger activity. Of course without a radio signal no individual identification

was possible. Once the collars had dropped off it became impossible to know if a badger being viewed was even one of those from the original release.

They had also been given identifying tattoos and had micro-chips implanted, but these were of no use as the badgers were never seen close enough to know if there was a tattoo, and reading a micro-chip required specialist equipment. However, on the couple of occasions when dead badgers were

found in the area it could at least be ascertained by the absence of a tattoo that those animals were not part of the release.

During 2014 and 2015 trail cameras continued to be left at various times for varying lengths at the three setts identified as ones that the released badgers primarily occupied. This was out of ten setts in total where radio collar signals indicated use at one time or another.

A great new piece of kit

The process of successfully identifying the badgers then took an upturn when Adam Grogan, the RSPCA officer overseeing the project, took delivery of a purpose-built micro-chip reader set on to a 4-foot plastic pipe within a box topped by an apex roof. The pipe (or tunnel) was big enough for an adult badger to pass through from one end to the other, and whilst doing so the chip reader could pick up the data on the micro-chip for later retrieval and hopefully animal identification.

Whilst the equipment was of a prototype nature, there were high hopes in the project team that identification would be possible and a plan was agreed to leave the chip reader tunnel through the summer of 2015 at the three main setts. Trail cameras would first be set up at each sett to check that badgers were still in evidence, with possible numbers.

In May 2015 at the sett where the male badger known as "3" had set up home, everyone was excited

to learn from the 30-second videos recorded by the camera that a mother and one cub were present. In this same month the chip reader tunnel was left on site, cameras set up and a trail of peanuts laid from sett entrance to and through the tunnel. For a couple of days the mother and cub (and on other occasions a lone adult) nervously investigated the alien object that had suddenly appeared on top of their home, eventually with the mother passing through the tunnel from one end to the other. The chip data picked up by the reader was that this was the released female badger known as "1". So not only do we have a positive indication that one of the released badgers is still in the area but that she has now produced a cub – an excellent start to the micro-chip reading exercise.

More cubs

In June 2015 the trail cameras showed that there was a mother and two cubs in residence at the large sett where as many as four radio-collared badgers had been picked up staying on the same night. The chip reader tunnel was placed there in July and videos recorded an adult and a cub passing through it.



The chip reader tunnel

The data recorded by the chip reader indicated this was the released female badger known as "4". So here was a second badger from the release project still in the area and a producer of two cubs.

There was great enthusiasm now to get the chip reader tunnel to the third big sett, a sett 1.25 kms from the original release site and where the male "5" was known to have made a home. Video and images from the trail cameras in January 2015 had shown two adults were active there, and the June 2015 footage hinted to me personally that a cub might be present but I couldn't be sure, and it was never corroborated by anyone else. Unfortunately it was not possible to get the chip reader tunnel set up there this year.

So plans are afoot to continue leaving the chip reader tunnel in the release area in 2016. We are hoping the equipment can be left permanently at one sett or another throughout. It would be great to one day identify "2", "3" and "4".

The WSBG's sett monitoring workshops are being well attended and the



Badger leaving the chip reader tunnel

last session in November was held specifically at this release area, as reported by Alex on page 8 of this newsletter. If all goes well there should be a strong team of volunteers available to give this project the attention it deserves.

Another badger

As an aside to the badger release project but still in the area, in June 2015 a Wildlife Aid rescued female was released into a small sett about 350 metres from the original project release sett. The animal had been micro-chipped in case she should pass through the chip reader tunnel at any point in the future. A camera was left at this sett for two weeks and showed the badger still there with other adult badgers passing by alone or as a pair. The sett was last checked at the end of November 2015 and looked unused. Maybe this recently released badger will pass through the chip reader tunnel some time in 2016 and also be identified?

Mother "1" and cub



MEMBERS' PAGE

Forty years ago you tried to eradicate us
with your foul, creeping death.
You said we were guilty and had to pay,
our cries did not deter you, our pain did not soften your hearts.

Finally you protected us from those whose sport we were,
some of you revered us and some of you honoured us,
but we were cautious of your actions
and kept our distance, away from your sight.

Now you come again with a different weapon
and once again you say we must die to appease,
so we wait until you tire of the killing and look to your science
for the answers that your hearts ignore.

We have foraged and lived on this land
for over two hundred and fifty thousand years,
long before your kind and we will still be here
long after you are dust in the wind.
We will prevail and you will fail,
we are strong and we are wise,
and we will survive.

by Susan Clee





BETTY EDWARDS

We are very sad to report the passing away of one of our original members, Betty Edwards, in May 2015.

Betty joined WSBG as soon as it was formed. She lived in Farley Heath and had a very large badger sett just outside the end of her garden. The badgers were welcome visitors as Betty fed them regularly. I was lucky enough to visit Betty several times and also took visitors to see badgers for the first time.

Betty kept us informed about hunt activities in the area so we could check all the badger setts in case they were blocked or dug into. Betty's enthusiasm for badgers and all wildlife always shone through when I met her or spoke to her by phone, She will be sadly missed.
Dave Williams

Betty's daughter sent us this:

"Mum lived on Farley Heath and Farley Green all her life. She was always an outdoor lady – leaving school she worked at a local market garden, then she went on to do her own gardening for local people. All her spare time was taken up with keeping her own garden and veg area tidy and colourful. Her garden was a

major talking point by most of the walkers on the heath.

Her love of animals started at a very young age. At 13 she got her first horse. Her other passion, which a lot of people did not know, was motorbikes. My parents delayed their honeymoon so they could go to watch the Isle of Man TT Races.

Throughout her life animals and wildlife played a major role. Most weekends, when it was not raining, she would do car boot sales, to raise money for the numerous animal charities she supported. Every week when Mum went shopping, the majority of food was for her pets or wildlife. They came before her own needs.

She spent many an hour checking badger setts, as well as shouting at passing fox hunters. If Mum had had her way all the wildlife would have been inside to help keep them protected.

She was an amazing lady, a wonderful grandma to my daughter Chloe, and an ambassador to the wildlife and countryside. I am a very proud daughter."

Betty's family have placed a wooden seat in her memory close to her home.

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 February 23 **Derek Smith, Surrey Bat Group**

Derek recently went on a memorable trip to Borneo, principally to see the marvellous bats there, but he also saw some very interesting mammals. His talk is entitled **Borneo, Bats and more.**

Tuesday March 22 **Becky Harris-Jones, beekeeper**

No, not honeybees! Becky has created a bumblebee sanctuary within her garden and she studies, photographs and films them. In her talk, **The Incredible Life of the Bumblebee**, she will reveal what amazing creatures they are, and their importance to us.

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.

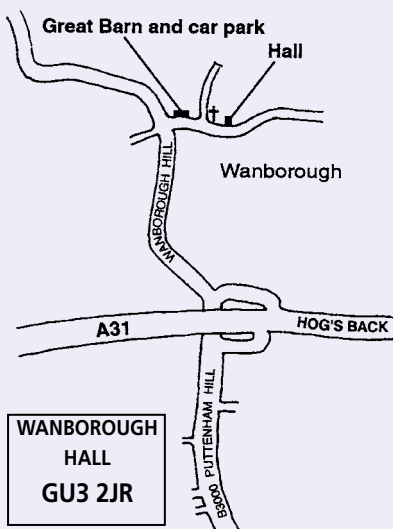
Tuesday May 24 at 7.30 **WSBG AGM with guest speaker**

Saturday March 12 Badger workshop and field trip

The workshop at Wanborough Hall is a classroom session about ecology, field signs, rescues and other badger work. After lunch we visit a local sett.

We start at 10.00 and finish between 3.00 and 4.00. Bring a packed lunch.

Booking is essential and numbers are limited. Please email or phone to book.

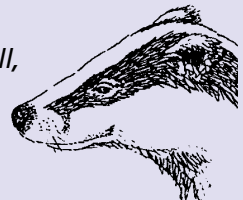


All evening meetings start at 8pm and are held in Wanborough Hall unless otherwise stated.

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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