

Raising Awareness of Badger Crime:

An educational video for teenagers and secondary schools

Brought to you by Naturewatch Foundation and Alex Collins

(Naturewatch Foundation is a registered charity, No. 1039679)



Target audience:

- Children aged 13 and over in schools, youth groups and other appropriate settings
- Adults who may wish to learn more about the subject and how they can help

Overview:

- What is wildlife crime?
- Badger ecology
- What is badger baiting?
- UK wildlife crime priorities
- Badger baiting's links to other forms of crime
- How to help

Most importantly of all, we want to inspire young people to care about badgers!

VIDEO CONTENT

Wildlife Crime

What is wildlife crime?

- There is no legal definition of wildlife crime, which makes it more difficult to protect wildlife from persecution.
- Wildlife crime is a big problem in the UK.
- National Wildlife Crime Unit description of wildlife crime:
 - In general, wildlife crime is any action which contravenes current legislation governing the protection of the UK's wild animals and plants and includes:
 - Hare coursing
 - Deer poaching
 - Fish poaching
 - Badger persecution – including baiting, snaring, shooting, and disturbance of setts
 - Bat persecution
 - Egg theft / collection
 - Bird of prey persecution – through poisoning, trapping, shooting, disturbance of nest and/or theft of chicks
 - The trade in ivory, tortoises, rhino horn and other protected species covered by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) including caviar, Traditional Chinese Medicines, and orchids)
 - Non-registration of certain birds and animals that require licensing through DEFRA/Animal Health if kept in captivity or sold.

Why do people commit wildlife crime?

- Motivations:
 - Sadistic – Involves inflicting pain and terror on animals for the purpose of entertainment in what we call ‘blood sports’. Badger baiting is one of these blood sports.
 - Financial – Often the motivation to commit this type of wildlife crime is linked to financial gain, as large sums of money can be exchanged in illegal betting and selling of animals used in blood sports. The trade in endangered species like rhino horn or ivory can be a profitable but very risky and unethical way to make money.
 - Obsession – people are motivated to commit wildlife crime for purposes such as egg collecting – this involves the collection of wild birds’ eggs; including iconic species such as Peregrine Falcons.

Badger Ecology

What is a badger?

- Badgers belong to the Mustelid family – which also includes animals such as weasels, otters, ferrets, martens, and minks.

What do they eat?

- They are Britain’s largest mustelid, but this doesn’t mean that they’re dangerous to humans!
- They are opportunistic omnivores and mainly eat earthworms. [Not in video: They also eat insects, cereals, small mammals, birds, eggs, fruit and lots of other things – including wasps’ nests!]
- [Not in video: Badgers will eat almost anything, but if you do find a friendly badger where you live and would like to feed them, make sure you don’t feed them sugary food.]
- Badgers love peanuts!

Where do badgers live?

- Badgers live in holes in the ground called setts.
- Setts can have lots of entrances – sometimes up to 50 – and are made up of different chambers, deep beneath the earth.
- Badgers usually live in a little family of 4-8 members – this is called a clan.
- Badgers are incredibly important to Britain’s ecology and maintaining a balanced ecosystem, so badgers’ setts are highly protected by law. Damage to a sett could lead to a fine of up to £5000!
- The badger sett sits inside a territory. All badger families have this home territory where they find their food. The size of their territory depends upon how much food is around.
- They mark the boundaries of these territories with latrines, or dung pits, to tell other badgers to stay away! (If you want to find the edge of your local badger territory, you can often find them along edges of fields, fence-lines and hedges.)

How have badgers adapted?

- They have big, strong claws to help them with digging and foraging for food.
- They have a very strong sense of smell. If you’ve been near a badger sett, they can smell you for up to 24 hours.
- Their colouring is thought to have been to ward off previous predators, i.e. lynx, bears and wolves, which are no longer live wild in the UK.
- Badgers do vary in colour: there are also sometimes black (melanistic), white (albino) and ginger (erythristic) badgers.
- Badgers’ eyes light up when you shine a light on them. They have a special membrane behind their retina called a tapetum lucidum, which reflects light and helps them to see in the dark. Cats and dogs have these too!

How to tell if a badger sett is active

In order to prosecute someone for disturbing a badger sett, you need to prove that it is active, i.e. that badgers are currently using it. In this section of the video, expert Ray Puttock tells Naturewatch Foundation patron, Dan Richardson, how to tell if a sett is active.

- Badgers rub their tummies on the ground outside the entrance to their sett, 'polishing' it. They polish a track of the way they go.
- They dig 'spoil' out of their sett to keep the entrance clear, creating heaps.
- Occasionally, badger hairs may be found at the sett entrance.
- The above signs may lead badger protection groups to install a wildlife camera and monitor the sett.
- Latrines mark the territory.
- Foxes, rabbits and rats also use badger setts – signs of activity don't necessarily mean badgers are living there. It's important to identify that the sett is being used specifically by badgers. Badgers are the only animals that create the polished tracks.

Applicable laws

Lots of people don't realise that badger persecution is illegal. Some children may have even witnessed their parents or peers participating in it.

- Protection of Badgers Act 1992 – covers taking a badger from its sett, injuring badger, sett disturbance (e.g. sending dogs into the sett, sett blocking, digging etc.). It is more about disturbing the home of the badger and to take, injure, kill or sell it or its body parts. Most aspects of the badger baiting process are covered under this law, but it can also be an offence under the following:
 - Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – covers the illegal use of poisons, traps and snares.
 - The Hunting Act 2004 – covers the pursuit of a wild mammal by dogs, lamping badgers at night with the use of dogs etc.
 - Animal Welfare Act 2006 – this act was designed for domestic animals, but it can be applied to badgers when they are deemed to be under the care or control of man. It deals with the unnecessary suffering of animals and animal fighting. For example, if a dog sees a badger and attacks it, or if the dog is in the sett and is attacking the badger, the law argues that the badger is not under the control of man. However, if the badger is trapped somehow, in a cage or a snare, or the man starts to join in and intentionally harm the badger, there is argued to be human control over the badger and this law then applies.
 - Wild Mammal (Protection) Act 1996 – under this law it is an offence to stab, beat, kick, hit or inflict any kind of harm on wild mammals through physical means.

The next section of the film may cause distress.

Badger Baiting

As lots of people don't know what badger baiting is, it is explained with example images from real cases. The images contain the injuries that the badgers and dogs sustain.

What is badger baiting?

- It's a cruel 'blood sport', where badgers are dug or dragged from their setts and made to fight dogs, often to the death. If the badger doesn't die from fighting, they are shot or killed in other ways.
- Badger baiting has been illegal since 1835, but still takes place all over the UK.
- Dogs are sent into the sett to find and drag out the badger. Dogs have been known to get stuck inside collapsed badger setts if a baiter digs in a weakened spot.
- The dogs sustain terrible injuries around their muzzles, chests and front legs, which are rarely treated by a vet to avoid being reported; and they are often stitched up without anaesthetic.
- Often the dogs used by baiters are kept in appalling conditions in cages, sheds or at allotments in order not to arouse suspicion from neighbours.

- Dogs are fitted with tracking collars. The baiters dig down into the sett to where the dog's radio signal is coming from in a process called 'crowning down'.
- Once the badger is taken from the sett, the fight either begins outside; or the badger is trapped into a cage and transported to a terrifying fighting arena.
- Large sums of money are exchanged as people gamble on how long the badger will last and which dog will win.
- The fights are brutal, but if the badger is lasting too long, baiters have been known to hit them with shovels in order to weaken them.
- Dead badgers are sometimes dumped at the side of the road to look like roadkill.
- The dogs involved can be bred and sold for large sums of money.

Badgers are some of the most persecuted animals in the UK, not only through badger baiting but also from shooting, trapping, snares and poison. That's why it's so important to report suspicious activity and raise awareness.

The level of persecution is what makes badger baiting a UK Wildlife Crime Priority.

More information about each wildlife crime priority is available here:
<https://www.nwcu.police.uk/how-do-we-prioritise/priorities/>

Badger baiting is often linked to other crimes including drug use, abuse, burglary and theft.

A badger baiting case from the news

- An 18-month investigation by Cumbria Constabulary's Serious and Organised Crime Unit led to eight men from the county being jailed for a total of nearly 40 years.
- The badger killers were only caught after one of them was arrested for ATM thefts and mobile footage was recovered. The footage was handed to the RSPCA that showed west Cumbrian men badger digging and baiting.
- Some of the men received suspended sentences for crimes against badgers and deer.
- More information (not included in the video):
 - Investigating officer Jason Bowles said: "On the phone we found multiple images and videos showing the men out with their dogs, digging into badger setts and setting their dogs on badgers. This 'sport' is cruel and barbaric, and I'm sure this footage would be incredibly upsetting for the public to see."
 - PC Samantha O'Key, Cumbria Police wildlife, rural and environmental crime coordinator, said: "We are very pleased with the outcome of this investigation and the subsequent convictions that have been brought against these individuals, as Cumbria Police takes animal cruelty very seriously. We worked diligently with our RSPCA colleagues and this is a good example of partnership working at its most effective."
 - <https://www.cumbriacrack.com/2019/04/04/watch-cumbria-atm-theft-gang-jailed-for-almost-40-years/>
 - <https://www.timesandstar.co.uk/news/18625702.badger-killers-caught-man-investigated-different-crime/>

How to help

Join your local badger group

There are lots of groups in the UK. Find your local group on the Badger Trust website – www.badgertrust.org.uk

Naturewatch Foundation's covert investigations

Naturewatch Foundation conducts cybercrime investigations into suspected badger baiters through its confidential reporting hotline. There is also a reporting form on the website – www.naturewatch.org

To raise awareness, five leaflets can be requested by contacting info@naturewatch.org

[Message from Naturewatch Foundation's Animal Crime Manager]

'A Badger's Tale'

Naturewatch Foundation will provide teachers and group leaders with one free copy of a wildlife crime novel.

A Badger's Tale, is a challenging story full of magic and healing that only the natural world can bring. Rejected by his mother and threatened by the human world he has been cast into; Liam finds sanctuary in a clan of badgers.

He discovers his purpose for living by caring for wild animals, until a gang of hunters turn his new-found world that he has grown to love upside down.

Reporting badger crime

In this section, we discuss what to look out for if badger baiting is suspected in your local area, and what teenagers can do to help; without endangering themselves.

It is important to emphasise again here that badger baiters are often dangerous individuals, involved in other forms of crime against people too. Therefore, our advice is to not engage with badger baiters if you see suspicious behaviour and to go to a safe place to report what you saw.

Call 999 if you see an incident is in progress or call 101 for non-emergencies.

If you suspect someone of being involved in badger baiting, you can also report them to Naturewatch Foundation. Naturewatch Foundation will keep all of your details completely confidential and work with the police and other enforcement agencies to investigate the case and bring badger baiters to justice.

Contact details for reporting: andrew@naturewatch.org or 07392 185373.

[Message from Naturewatch Foundation patron, actor Dan Richardson]

Badger baiting has been going on for hundreds of years – and it will continue unless we do something about it!

[Credits]