

BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR HOME OWNERS

INTRODUCTION

Your house has been constructed on land which forms part of a badger social group's territory. Badgers are nocturnal mammals which live in groups comprising c. 6 animals. Each group occupies a territory, the size of which ranges from c.50 ha on average to c.300ha or more, depending on feeding habitat. They are omnivorous, feeding on a wide variety of food from earthworms to plant foods such as fruit, nuts and crops. Being nocturnal you may not see them very often, but they are quite likely to visit your garden on a regular basis. In the majority of cases such visits go unnoticed. However, occasionally minor damage to gardens can be caused. This guidance note provides information on how to live in harmony with your badgers.

WHY MAY BADGERS VISIT MY GARDEN?

Badgers are very site faithful. In many cases the same territories and pathways have been occupied and traversed by generations of badgers. Although houses have been constructed, your garden may still occupy part of a social group's territory. Badgers may visit your garden in order to obtain food or for the purpose of moving between feeding areas along traditional badger pathways.

When feeding in the garden, badgers are able to exploit several sources of food. Regularly mown lawns and other areas of amenity grassland associated with housing developments can provide a source of earthworms which are a favourite food item for badgers. Flower bulbs may also prove attractive, as will fallen fruit from fruit trees or bushes. Strawberries are also a favourite. Badgers may also be attracted to scraps of food (especially nuts) beneath bird feeding stations.

FEEDING WILD BADGERS

Some people regularly feed badgers with, for example, peanuts, raisins, cheese, chopped apples, carrots and cooked potatoes. Badgers quickly become used to such handouts and to artificial lighting.

Supplementary feeding provides an opportunity for close views of one of our most charismatic wild mammals and can be a source of considerable pleasure. It may also increase cub survival during dry summers when natural food is in short supply. In normal years supplementary feeding also increases the growth rates of cubs and may enhance their chances of survival to adulthood.

However, supplementary feeding is not without problems and you should consider carefully the following questions beforehand:

- Are you prepared to accept the possibility that your garden, and that of your neighbours, may be damaged by visiting badgers?

- Are you creating a situation where badgers become dependent on the food which you provide? In extreme circumstances the feeding of large volumes of food every night can increase badger numbers within a social group such that their territory may no longer be able to provide all the nourishment that they require.
- Are you inadvertently encouraging people/badger conflicts? For example, are your neighbours likely to be as tolerant as you are of badgers in the garden? Will badgers have to cross busy roads in order to access your food? If so, you are increasing the chances of badger road mortality.

If you decide to feed badgers in your garden it is probably best therefore to do so sparingly (not too much food) and infrequently, perhaps confining feeding to periods of drought or long, cold frosty periods when badgers will find it difficult to obtain earthworms.

BADGER DAMAGE TO GARDENS

Badgers can cause damage to garden environments in several ways by:

- Damaging fences in order to gain entrance to or travel across the garden. This could occur particularly where a fence has been erected across a traditional badger pathway.
- Burrowing under garden sheds, patios, decking etc.
- Digging up lawns as the badgers search for insect larvae such as leatherjackets.
- Feeding on soft fruits: badgers are particularly keen on strawberries, raspberries and gooseberries.
- Feeding on vegetable crops such as potatoes and carrots.
- Feeding on flower bulbs.
- Leaving faeces in pits excavated in lawns or flower beds. These pits are frequently used to delineate territorial boundaries.
- Raiding dustbins.

Such problems are rarely serious and frequently short-term such that many gardeners tolerate the occasional nuisance.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT BADGER DAMAGE TO GARDENS?

If badger damage to the garden is persistent there are several measures that can be taken to prevent or minimise the problem.

- Exclude badgers from accessing the garden by means of badger proof fencing (specification details given below)

- Badger damage to wooden or wire fencing: consider inserting a length of pipe of c.22cm in diameter through or under the fence. This should be positioned on the badger pathway and will allow badgers access whilst helping to minimise further damage to the fence.
- Burrowing under garden buildings or other structures: install heavy gauge wire mesh vertically downwards from the base of the structure to c.300mm underground depth with a horizontal return of c.300mm. Alternatively, place horizontally at surface level and extend c.300mm outwards from the structure. However, if you think that the structure may be a sett then you should seek advice from your local Scottish Natural Heritage Area Office (see www.snh.org.uk for addresses) before proceeding as you may need a license.
- Digging up lawns: insert a temporary electric fence around the lawn (damage is usually temporary). Fleximesh electric fences can be readily obtained from agricultural merchants (they are frequently used for stock and poultry management. For further information see DEFRA website (see references below). You should be aware that hedgehogs can occasionally become trapped in electric fences. This happens when the bottom electrified wire is placed at hedgehog height. This risk can be reduced by positioning the bottom wire slightly higher so that hedgehogs can easily pass underneath without coming in contact with the wire.

Alternatively apply appropriate approved non-persistent insecticides or vermicides which will kill the insects or worms that are attracting the badgers. Use formulations containing carbaryl or a mixture of carbaryl and rotenone. These insecticides/vermicides should only be used as a last resort: not only will they remove insects and worms of value to other wildlife such as birds, but they may also result in deterioration in soil structure in the long term. Another option would be to spray aluminium ammonium sulphate powder (a taste repellent) mixed with water onto the lawn during periods when they are likely to be dug. See below.

- Damage to soft fruit crops or vegetables: erect a temporary electric fence comprising 2 strands of electrified polywire placed at 7.5cm and 20cm above ground level. If you are concerned about hedgehogs becoming trapped by the lower wire you should raise the height of this to 15cm.
- Damage to flower bulbs: dip the bulbs in approved taste repellents such as aluminium ammonium sulphate powder. Products such as “Scoot” and “Stay Off”, which are available from garden centres and pet shops, contain this repellent.
- Raiding dustbins: secure lid with bungee chords.
- The only way to permanently exclude badgers from your garden will involve the installation of permanent weld-mesh fencing which should conform to a specification of 2.5mm gauge wire and a 25mm x 50mm welded mesh size. This fencing is sold under the brand name “Sentinal Badger Fencing: Scottish Pattern”. When ordering it is essential to specify that the Scottish Pattern type of fencing is required. Badgers will climb or break through other types of fencing. Care will need to be taken to

ensure that no gaps are left below gates and that a 300mm horizontal mesh return is clipped to the vertical mesh 300mm below the soil surface. This buried horizontal lap will prevent badgers digging underneath the fence. Fence height will need to be a minimum of 1 metre.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Highly readable and informative sources of information can be found in the form of the following illustrated publications:

- Badgers. *Naturally Scottish Series, Scottish Natural Heritage, Publications Section. £3.00. Tel. 01738 444177 Available to read online at www.snh.org.uk/pubs/default.asp*
- Scotland's Wildlife: Badgers and Development. *Scottish Natural Heritage. Publications Section. Tel. 01738 444177 Available to read online at www.snh.org.uk/pubs/default.asp*
- Badgers. *Michael Clark. Whittet Books, 2001. ISBN 0-905483-65-0* Another highly readable and informative book
- Badger Problems: advice to householders. DEFRA Technical Advice Note (TAN 07 2005). See DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk
- Badger Problems: use of electric fencing to prevent damage. DEFRA Technical Advice Note (TAN 15, 2004). See DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk

For advice on specific problems you should contact Scottish Badgers (Tel. 01356 624851) or www.scottishbadgers.org.uk/ .