Badgers on Golf Courses

Many golf courses are home to badgers and often they can live in harmony. Sometimes however, badger activity can cause damage to playing surfaces. This guideline outlines badger management methods available to golf clubs and possible mitigation options to reduce impacts.

Firstly, review the extent of badger activity and affected areas. Is the damage to semi-rough, the edge of fairways or tees and greens? To what extent is the damage? Are there scrapes and if so of what size? Deep scrapes, like those in the photograph below, cause problems for golfers by making it difficult to play a shot if a ball lands in the scrape.

Management Options

Removal of badgers

Removal or destruction of badgers is not a realistic option. They are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Although licences can be issued in extreme circumstances it is unlikely that the level of damage on the course would be considered sufficient. Additionally, if there is a high population of badgers locally they would simply repopulate from adjacent areas.

Fencing vulnerable areas

Fencing is unlikely to be particularly effective, and would be expensive. A survey would need to be carried out to assess all areas where the badgers are accessing the course. Any fencing would have to cover those access points and several hundred metres to either side. It is likely that the whole course boundary would need to be fenced. Badgers are likely to break through fencing and dig under, rabbit fencing and standard stock fencing. The specification for badger- proof fencing is very expensive.

An access point being used by badgers

Cultural techniques

Badgers prefer to forage in grass under 5cm in height. Allowing semi rough and rough to develop over this height in badly affected areas may help deter badgers from foraging there.

Removal of grass clippings from mown areas will reduce worm populations, and result in a less plentiful supply of food for the badgers, as well as the golfing benefits associated with reduced worm populations. The clippings should preferably be composted.

Supplementary Feeding

Supplementary feeding of the badgers to prevent them from digging up the turf for food could be an option. The food supply should be left in an out of play area away from the course (preferably in out-of-play areas in grasses under 5cm in height) in easy reach for the badgers and preferably as near as possible to their natural foraging area.

Course Planting

If you have a badger set on your course you can plant strategically to encourage them to forage away from the in-play managed grasslands, minimising any scrapings and damage to in-play turf.

- Grass - If at all possible some areas should be mown regularly so that the grass is short enough for the badgers to find earthworms. Earthworms are their main food. The grass clippings should be kept on a nearby compost heap, to provide a useful supply of earthworms and invertebrates. There should also be areas of longer grass if possible to provide cover for possible prey such as short tailed field voles and wood mice.

- Planting of trees and shrubs around a badger sett could include any of the following British native trees, most of which produce fruit of some kind, together with low growing shrubs to provide badgers with some cover and privacy:
  1. Blackberry (Rubus fruticosus) – badgers feed from areas of bramble and blackberries
  2. Elder (Sambucus nigra) – badgers are said to enjoy elderberries
  3. Apple (Pyrus malus)
  4. Pear (Pyrus communis)
  5. Oak (Quercus robur) may be planted (though not in great quantity); in the longer term these provide acorns which are said to provide a valuable source of autumn food for badgers in years when the acorn crop is good.
  6. Blackthorn - (sloe) - Prunus spinosa
  7. Bird Cheery - prunus padus
  8. Wild Cherry - Prunus avium
  9. Crabapple (wild) - Malus sylvestris
  10. Guelder Rose - Viburnum opulus
  11. Hazel - Corylus avellana
  12. Holly, Green - Ilex aquifolium
  13. Mountain Ash - rowan - Sorbus aucuparia
  14. Plum, Myrobolan - Prunus cerasifera
  15. Hawthorn (Quickthorn) - Crataegus monogyna
  16. Rose (Dog Rose) - Rosa canina and other native roses
  17. Wayfaring Tree - Viburnum lantana

18. Planting bluebells (hyacinthoides non scripta) and pignut (conopodium majus) to provide edible bulbs and tubers, and in the case of bluebells fragrant bedding.

Herbicides should not be used when planting new trees (this is because voles often attack the roots of new trees, badgers like voles and so the herbicide will go pass up the food chain to the badger).

A water source is a good idea if there is a lack of water in the area. If you are creating a wildlife pond, badger claws can damage the "plastic liners". Flat stones or pebbles etc. can be used to protect the edges of the plastic and should extend under the shallow water.

Repellent Products

Renardine is now a banned substance and should not be used.

Noise-Repellents

Although there are no published papers on the subject of noise repellents and badgers reports of a sonic device manufactured by a company called Proctor under the name “Pest Stop Outdoors” is reported to have been used with success. The device which is battery or mains supplied can be used to target several species including deer and badgers. The device operates in an arc of about 70x50 feet and could be used in areas of high attack by badgers. Further details available from Proctor at www.pest-stop.co.uk

Local Golf Rules

Areas where badger damage has occurred could be declared as ground under repair, and golfers given relief. This would allow the affected holes to be played fairly when damage occurs.

Set a tolerance threshold

When setting thresholds of acceptable damage, it is best to allow a degree of disruption than trying to eradicate every piece of damage.

Education & Communication

There are many golf clubs that are pleased to share their course with badgers and are proud to be helping with their conservation. Information about badgers, and their national importance could be disseminated to staff and golfers alike. This could be done through posters in the clubhouse, on

notice boards, newsletters and presentations by your local Badger Group (www.badgers.org.uk). A better understanding may lead to more tolerance.

New developments

Planners and golf/housing developers and architects should work in conjunction with Scottish Badgers, SWT (Scottish Wildlife Trust) and SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage) to ensure disturbance to the badgers both during construction and after completion is kept to an absolute minimum. Badgers are a protected species in Scotland (and the rest of the UK) under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

Conclusion

None of the above actions will solve the problem singularly. However, by implementing a number of actions the situation will be improved and the presence of badgers will become more acceptable and less of a problem.

Scottish Golf recommends a long term study of badgers on the golf course is undertaken. In order to give a long term and sustainable solution, an understanding of the local badger population is vital. The study should ascertain the levels of damage, patterns of damage and the testing of various mitigation techniques. There are several consultants that are suitably qualified to conduct this type of project.

Further information and expert advice

Scottish Badgers - www.scottishbadgers.org.uk

SNH Badgers and Development - http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/on-line/wildlife/badgersanddevelopment/development.asp

SNH Badger Licences - http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/species-licensing/mammal-licensing/badgers-and-licensing/dev/