

Crime

PLEASE NOTE THAT WILDLIFE CRIMINALS, ESPECIALLY THOSE INVOLVED IN BADGER BAITING, CAN BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. NEVER APPROACH SUSPECTS OR INTERVENE IF YOU SUSPECT SOMEONE IS COMMITTING A WILDLIFE CRIME - YOU MAY PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER.

How to Report a Wildlife Crime

Priorities at any crime scene are:

**Your safety and the safety of those with you.
The welfare of any injured animals
The preservation of the scene for subsequent investigation**

ALL crimes or suspected crimes should be reported by using the 101 or 999 number as appropriate. When this is done an incident number should be obtained and carefully noted.

If the incident is historical: Contact Police Scotland on **101**. Ask to speak with a Wildlife Crime Liason Officer. If a WCLO is not available give details to the Service Centre Advisor. Ask for and record the incident number.

If the incident is ongoing and there is a threat to health or property: Contact Police Scotland on **999**. Give details to the Service Centre Advisor. The nearest unit will attend at the scene. Ask for and record the incident number.

If the incident involves an injured animal that is suffering: Contact the SSPCA on **03000 999 999** and then follow the above steps for contacting Police Scotland.

Once you have contacted the police and/or the SSPCA please send brief details of the incident, including the incident number, to our Species Protection Co-ordinator speciesprotection@scottishbadgers.org.uk as soon as possible. Please note her working days and the alternative emergency number if she is unavailable.

If police officers attend then note their time of arrival, names and numbers. Also note the time of departure. You should not remain at the scene when the officers depart, nor should you return there without specific notification from the police that the matter is concluded.

If you discover what you believe may be a scene of crime do not interfere with anything. Retreat as carefully as you can and take photographs if possible. It is worth remembering when approaching a sett, whether previously unknown or regularly visited, that you may be walking into a crime scene. This is sadly very common in some parts of the country. Try to make a brief but careful assessment of the sett first before moving on to it This can avoid trampling over the scene and obliterating any evidence that may be there.

Whilst the public have the right to roam for the purposes of surveying and monitoring setts they have no powers whatsoever to enter or remain on land to investigate crime. If you believe a crime has been committed then you should NOT visit the site unless in the company of a serving police constable and at their request.

Badger crime comes in many forms from badger baiting - the practice of digging out a sett and then setting dogs on the badgers - to careless or unlicensed activities by persons engaged in otherwise legal activities such as development, forestry or agricultural operations. The manner in which badgers are killed is often extremely cruel and can include being ripped apart by dogs or entombed underground when sett entrances are blocked. In other incidents badgers have been gassed, shot or drowned by slurry pumped into their setts.

There are a number of signs of crime that members of the public may come across when surveying for and visiting badger setts. If you encounter these they should be reported as detailed above.

Sett Gassing: This illegal and highly dangerous practise still occurs. Cyanide crystals are placed in the sett entrances which are then blocked with plastic sacks containing earth. These are then covered with loose earth to blend in with the surroundings. The plastic sacks act as a seal and if removed it is likely that cyanide gas will be released and will poison anyone in the immediate vicinity. If you find a sett that you suspect has been treated in this way then police need to be informed immediately using the 999 number as this is a serious threat to life.

Sett Digging: Badger baiting often involves digging into a sett to recover a terrier dog and/or extract a badger. Sometimes these “crowning down holes” are left open and sometimes they are back filled. The open holes are fairly obvious and can be huge. Back filled holes can be identified by the square shape of the disturbed earth which is usually at least 30cm square. The bigger the back filled square the deeper the crowning down hole went. Signs of badger baiting like this should be reported to the police using the 101 number and also to speciesprotection@scottishbadgers.org.uk. Don't forget to get an incident number.

Snaring: It is not legal to snare badgers. When they are caught in a snare they tend to fight hard against it. The energy that they expend desperately trying to escape causes them to create a circle known as a “doughnut”. This is characteristic of badgers being snared and is sometimes found in the landscape long after the dead badger and the snare have been removed. Where the snare has been set near an obstruction, such as a fence, the doughnut may be partial. If you find a doughnut you should report it to the police using the 101 number and also inform speciesprotection@scottishbadgers.org.uk. Don't forget to get an incident number.

SSPCA have no powers to investigate a snare unless an animal is caught in it. This means that any snares which are believed to be illegal per-se or illegally set, and do not contain an animal, alive or dead, should be reported to the police. If you are unsure whether a snare is illegal or illegally set then please note as much detail as you can, taking photographs if possible, and seek advice from info@scottishbadgers.org.uk or 07792-142446. A picture showing the details to note and include in photographs is below. Please refer to the snaring leaflet for more details.

- 1) The lock on the snare
- 2) The way the snare is connected to the anchor line
- 3) The way the snare is connected to the tealer
- 4) The tealer itself (height and construction)
- 5) The distance between the bottom of the loop and the ground
- 6) The stop on the loop that prevents complete closure

Please be aware that, whatever your views on snaring, it is illegal to remove or interfere with a snare unless you are the operator. In recent snaring cases there have been frequent allegations that the snares in question were set by the complainers. Take photographs and leave discretely if possible.

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