

WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP



NEWSLETTER 67 JANUARY 2014

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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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Welcome to our new members

Nicola Brangwyn
Carolyn Clydesdale
Alison Searle
Derek Swallow
Danial Winchester

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Nick Nickells

As I prepare to write my report (29th November), it has been announced that Natural England have realised their objective has not been achieved and the badger cull has been cancelled (see Dave's Badger Trust update on page 7). The pro-cull lobby's statement that "badgers have moved the goalposts", its efforts to massage the statistics to produce "positive" results, and its lack of scientific support, all go to confirm what a complete waste of time, money and resources this whole episode has been. Let's hope that the subject of containing Bovine TB will be pursued in a more realistic and positive way.

This news is a fine ending to what has been a very busy year. Hopefully in 2014 we will be able to arrange for more members to take an active role in the work that still has to be done to finalise our plans for our Ruxley project. We will also be preparing our programme of Group meetings and your committee would welcome your ideas on subjects or possible speakers.

As I have mentioned before, there is still one more vacancy on the committee which we are anxious to fill. For various reasons, not all members are always available to attend our monthly 2-hour committee meetings. If you are interested, please contact me or any other member of the committee and we can arrange for you to sit in and find out what's involved.

I trust you have had an enjoyable Christmas and I look forward to us all having a Happy New Year.



Four of a group of six badgers regularly seen at a site in Godalming

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TREASURER'S REPORT

Nigel Mee

Well, it's five months since I wrote the last report and one would have thought that was plenty of time to write this one; but no, not for this treasurer, only now sitting down past deadline copy date to make a start. Our long-suffering newsletter editor Clare Windsor does such a great job for the charity and late contributors like myself don't help I know!

I am going to write this report in two stages this time. The first is to tell you of the normal ebb and flow of the finances and where we stand with our income and expenditure. The second is to give you a very important piece of news that has happened that will have a tremendous impact on our Group and its work in the months, and possibly years, to come.

The current financial year's business has basically been one of prudence and austerity so far. Most of you will know that the

financial year starts on 1st April, so we are eight months in already. You, our loyal supporters, pay your subscriptions on an annual basis and the vast majority are gratefully received by us at the start of April. This always makes a helpful start to the year because by this early injection of funds building up quickly it means we are in a positive net credit position right from the start. Subscriptions and donations so far received have been £2,510, very slightly down on last year's £2,639.

To date total income from normal activities has been £4,676 where this time last year it was £4,212, which means income overall is slightly up. This is mainly due to an increase for the demand by a variety of organisations for Dave's services scrutinising and reporting from our database on sett locations and known badger activity. This year to date these data

search fees have brought in £845 whereas last year at the same time it was £325.

Expenditure has not been exceptional. We always try to keep costs down for the necessities like telephone, insurance, hall hire, postage, printing and the only large item of expenditure has been a donation of £1,000 to Wildlife Aid which is made every year. Total expenditure so far has been £2,807. Last year it had been higher because a donation had been made to the Badger Trust for £2,500 who had urgently needed to build up an anti-culling fund at that time.

In summary, so far this year income is £4,676 and expenditure £2,807, meaning an increase in the amounts held in the bank accounts of £1,869 from normal charity activities – and that's my first piece of news.

There's more . . .

I now bring you to the second story. Many of you will have known Mr Edwin Clements (Clem), who sadly died in October 2012. He was a champion for environmental protection, a naturalist, an animal and wildlife lover – and a true philanthropist. In his will he most generously included the West Surrey Badger Group as a beneficiary to receive a share of his residuary estate. In the last few days I have as treasurer on behalf of the charity, received that share as calculated by the estate solicitors, the amount of £39,933.20.

This is an overwhelming sum of money and it's difficult to find the right words, but find them I must. I am privileged to be witness to such an enormous act of generosity. The thoughtfulness of this gift that Clem planned during his life and made with his departing fills me with respect, while his caring and love for the badgers for after he had gone fills me with emotion. Our world needs people like Clem and those who knew him were lucky. Thank you Clem wherever you are.

The committee feels strongly that Clem's legacy should be put to good use directly

helping badgers, starting in 2014. To this effect we are asking all of you for suggestions and ideas for projects even at this early stage. We want to receive all thoughts whether it involves small one-off projects or large long-term projects. It is the responsibility of the committee to ensure that this unexpected and generous donation of unrestricted funds be used wisely, and I as treasurer will assist in its careful financial planning and control

On behalf of West Surrey Badger Group I thank all of you for your loyalty and support and hope the New Year 2014 goes well.

P LANNING REPORT

Dave Williams

Byfleet

The Romany site in Byfleet is still in the balance, with an appeal to be heard in January. There is still a huge amount of local opposition.

Addlestone and Thorpe

I have completed surveys recently for Runnymede Borough Council. Although the two sites – Hare Hill in Addlestone and St Annes Hill in Thorpe – contain badger setts, for a change the land is not for development. Instead, each site is being considered as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (known as a SANG). Although there may be some management and path maintenance, the management plan will ensure that the setts are protected as much as possible. Both sites are open access and are visited regularly by local residents.

Farnham

I visited a site in South Farnham where a house is being extended. The site is on a slope and halfway down the slope there are two partially used outliers. The developer has agreed to protect the setts during works, and fortunately they are both on the edge of the site, and should not be disturbed.

S SALES STALLS REPORT

Nigel Mee



Rustic Sunday, 28 July, Tilford Rural Life Centre, near Farnham

Jacqui, Alan and I had a good day running a sales stall for the West Surrey Badger Group here. The day was warm, almost humid, and the threatening rain clouds held off until it was all over.

On its publicity the event was described by the Rural Life Centre as: "Our annual family day out. Country crafts, country musicians and the ambience of a vanished way of life, plus a market selling local produce . . . steam powered rides on the light railway" and more. With the emphasis on rural crafts and activities the badger stall sat well amongst the others.

Amusingly, someone amongst the organisers had advertised that we were actually displaying live badgers on the day! I lost count of the number of people who turned up asking about them and, when learning that we had no living animals, nodded that they "didn't think you would have live badgers!". People bought some of the stock, of which the cuddly badgers are always popular.

We had many visitors wanting to talk about badgers and especially about the culling trials. Being a rural activities event also meant a strong farming bias, so it was

interesting to hear the views of one or two visitors who supported culling. It clearly showed to me what an emotive issue this whole dreadful idea is and how irrational some views can be.

The day started with our gazebo finally declaring its retirement and refusing to unfold as it should, bending its framework into as many opposite directions as possible. Fortunately the stallholders around me saw the plight and very quickly had four Samaritans each holding a corner pole and a fifth going round with a large roll of duct tape, forcing the uncooperative frame to stay in its correct position. Grateful thanks were shown to the fabulous five with badger badges and it was lovely to see them proudly wearing them through the day on their respective stalls. Needless to say, the twisted metal now lies in the gazebo graveyard in Witley

In our enthusiasm for the stall we forgot to take any photos on the day. However there is a very good video of it here: <http://www.rurallife.plus.com/rurallife/html/Gallery.html>

We felt it was a good place to have a stall, so we'll be back again next year.

The Chantry Wood sett – restorative justice

Jacqueline Christmas and Alan Johnson

Peter Eggleton with the Fire Service team who restored the badger sett in Chantry Wood



Jacqueline Christmas

Readers may recall the article in our April newsletter reporting the destruction of a large sett in Chantry Wood on Christmas Eve last year. Two Wheaten terriers had gone down the sett, and their rescue by the Fire Service (which involved some six hours of digging by a team of firemen) left what is best likened to a crater: a hole 5 metres across and 2 metres deep in the centre. Subsequent surveying indicated that the badgers had most probably decamped to an outlier sett further up the bank.

Starting to put things right

The process for restoring a badger sett starts with obtaining a licence from Natural England, but first we had to obtain the consent of the land-owner, Guildford Borough Council. Despite the obvious health and safety implications of a crater near a footpath, they were slow and indifferent. Eventually they consented, and WSBG was able to make the application. The licence stipulated that the work should not begin until after 1st July, after the end of the breeding season. Peter Eggleton, who has many years experience of sett restoration and repair, devised a plan to stabilise the remaining tunnel entrances and backfill the sett, where possible, using the excavated sand. Now he had to organise it.

PC Ryan Stephens, the local wildlife crime

Police Officer, who became very involved with the incident from the outset, thought that reparation was the most suitable course of action and recommended that the Fire Service should assist WSBG with the work. This seemed appropriate as it was they who had failed to follow the procedures that should have stopped the destruction happening in the first place. Organising this took some time, but the regional Group Commander, Charles Fairful, took a personal interest and on 22nd October Peter and Jacqui supervised the restoration with Group Commander Fairful and his team.

Some good has resulted

Both the Police and the Fire Service have learned from this incident. PC Ryan Stephens is now much more familiar with the Badger Act, and the protection it affords badgers. The Fire Service now understands that it should have acted differently and has amended its internal procedures for such incidents.

Regarding what to do when a dog enters a sett, as a rule, when left to itself, a dog will eventually come out of a sett of its own accord: panicking will only make the dog more anxious. The key is to give the dog time to extricate himself, at least 24-48 hours. Experience has shown that dogs can survive for

several days and still emerge alive and well.

Group Commander Fairful has invited WSBG (Jacqui and Dave) to give a presentation at a training day event on 18 December to talk about the work of WSBG and discuss how the Fire Service and the various wildlife groups can work better together in the future.

The *Surrey Advertiser* reported the sett repair work, thereby giving positive publicity to badger protection at a much-needed time,

given the shooting of badgers in Somerset and Gloucestershire.

While we will never know whether any badger cubs were in the sett at the time of the destruction, at least we are confident that everything possible has been done to allow the badgers in Chantry Wood to return to their sett.

We are very grateful to PC Ryan Stephens for his positive attitude and assistance.

Update on the badger cull trials

Dave Williams

During the consultations prior to adoption of its Bovine TB (bTB) Policy, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) made clear that the purpose of the two pilot culls was to test the efficacy, humaneness and safety of culling badgers by free shooting.

The Somerset cull started in late August and the Gloucester trial a week later. When it was realised that the targets could not be met, it transpired that there had been a revised target – according to DEFRA, a new survey was conducted just before the trials had begun, although this was not announced until the trials had nearly finished, and the targets on the licence had not been revised. Remarkably, the badger numbers had reduced drastically. According to the Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, the hard winter had reduced the number of badgers in both areas. (There is no evidence from anywhere in the UK that badger numbers dropped at any time this year.) He then made his absurd statement “the badgers moved the goalposts”.

The culls have clearly failed: in neither Somerset nor Gloucestershire did the cull come anywhere close to achieving the required 70% within 6 weeks, which had been set as the maximum cull period on the basis of advice from the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Tuberculosis Science Advisory Board (TBSAB), and which was longer than that

recommended in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) findings.

Under overwhelming political pressure from DEFRA and the Secretary of State, Natural England granted licences for an extension of culling this year in Somerset (3 more weeks) and Gloucestershire (8 more weeks).

It was also announced that the much more expensive cage trapping and shooting method would be used, although these trials were not originally meant for trap and shoot. The Somerset extension period expired and the required minimum of 70% had still not been achieved. The Gloucestershire extension period was due to expire on 18th December 2013, but on 29th November Natural England revoked the licence as the target was unlikely to be reached.

Figures now published show that the numbers killed were way below the targets in each area. But the Secretary of State claims that they were successful, a view not shared by anyone with any common sense. From the minutes of the meeting held by Natural England to discuss the licence extensions, it is clear that the decision was heavily influenced by the Government's chief veterinary officer. This was despite input from eminent biologist Professor David Macdonald of Oxford University. He told *The Guardian* in November: “My personal opinion as a biologist [is] not to continue the

cull. One could not have significant comfort that the original proposals would deliver gains to farmers. Extending the cull would make the outcome even less predictable and even more unpromising."

This ill-advised cut-rate shambles has involved miscalculation of badger populations, manipulated time scales, huge expense for the taxpayer in policing and survey costs, and the fiasco of repeatedly-missed targets. If it were not so serious it would be comical.

The cull has been a disaster. The government needs to cancel its killing plans once and for all and focus on improving cattle welfare, controlling cattle movements, increasing bio-security, and developing badger and cattle vaccination. The killing in Somerset and Gloucestershire may have ended for this year but, unbelievably, the government is still considering rolling out the policy of slaughtering badgers in up to 10 new areas of England next year.

The Brighton Anti-Cull March and Rally *Dave Williams*

In October a group from WSBG attended the Brighton March and Rally, adding to a crowd of between 500 and 800 people.

We assembled to hear a few speeches. Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton and a good supporter of Team Badger, could not be there but a councillor spoke for her. I followed with a short speech on behalf of the Badger Trust. Then Dominic Dyer of Care for the Wild, who is passionate about the cull, spoke fluently for 20 minutes and was inspirational.

During the 30-minute march through

Brighton the reception was very good, with lots of sympathy and shouts of support. (It had been a bit different at the Anti-Cull Rally in Taunton in September, where we were subjected to a few abusive comments.) The weather was kind although a bit breezy and sometimes difficult to hang on to any banners.

We're grateful to Vanessa, David, Susan, Jackie, Pat and Sue, with special thanks to Vanessa for making another wonderful WSBG banner.

Visits to the cull zones *Dave Williams*

Somerset

After joining the Taunton Anti-Cull Rally in September, a few of us from WSBG stayed on to join one of the Somerset night patrols. These comprise groups of people peacefully walking along public footpaths, in order to stop anyone shooting nearby because of the danger. This is perfectly legal and the police will not stop this peaceful action. I was accompanied by WSBG members Susan, Cheri, Vanessa and David.

In the afternoon we visited 'Camp Badger', a group of tents in a field a few miles outside Taunton housing that group of brave and dedicated protestors who, although always acting peacefully, would sometimes venture off the path and trespass to protect a badger

sett. We stayed for a while with them but left when they started their briefing for the evening patrols, usually based on intelligence. Many of them are seasoned campaigners, and admit to being hunt saboteurs. They had given up their comfortable homes to stay there as long as needed to campaign with direct action to stop the killing.

In the evening we assembled in a pre-arranged car park to meet with the organisers of the Somerset night walkers. We ate our fish and chips in the car park, accompanied by a police vehicle with four policemen (on double time as it was a weekend). We met the organisers and were split into several teams. We then drove for a long way westwards to

[continued on page 13]

BADGER RELEASE PROJECT

Peter Eggleton

Back in the summer Dave was asked by the RSPCA if we would be able to assist them by providing a release site for a group of orphaned cubs. This was not to be a simple release, but part of a study to follow the fortunes of the badgers immediately after release, and their activities for as long as possible after that.

Not very much is known about badgers post release: often they just disappear never to be seen again to whatever fate awaits them. We became extensively involved in the project and are still keeping an eye on the badgers to this day. These special badgers were fitted with radio transmitters on collars round their necks. The badgers were aged 18 months – they had to be to ensure their heads were large enough to stop the collars sliding off.

With enthusiastic agreement from the landowners, the National Trust, we were able to offer the badgers a site in our area. Fortunately, an artificial sett already existed at the location, having been built a few years previously as part of a major road development scheme. We examined the suitability of the site by checking the artificial sett and other setts close by for

signs of use by resident badgers and found the area only to show a minimal presence. The next task was to prepare the site for the cubs which meant installing an electric fence around the artificial sett, putting in bowls for water and straw for bedding.

The five cubs, 3 males and 2 females, arrived in July in two heavy wooden boxes. We marched them up to the site and entered them into the plastic pipe entrances. We, the 'Hindhead badger team', were kept busy for the first two weeks with morning check visits and evening feeding visits. Unlike releases we've done in late autumn, these badgers

Below: The release site with artificial sett. Right: There's some reluctance to leave a cosy box!





Jan Reen

Above: Each badger is fitted with a radio transmitter collar. Below left: some of them appreciate a ready-made sett entrance but (below right) some prefer DIY.



Jan Reen



Dave Williams

were active right from the start, and were out the first night. They had their one and only encounter with the electric fence, dug a dung pit, polished up all the food that had been carefully scattered about and hidden under logs and stones, dug a new entrance directly into the back of the

sett, and dragged in the straw we had left outside for them.

The team put up a night camera to see what was occurring and were able to capture film of all five doing what badgers do. The evening feed duties were best as it was often possible to watch the



Rodger Munt

Location of badgers 1, 3, 4 and 5 on 17th November, about 19 weeks after their release.

badgers emerge from the sett before dark. Sometimes a head would poke out from the entrance while we were still inside the fenced area putting out the food. The electric fence was removed at the end of the 2-week settling-in period and this coincided with the arrival of the RSPCA's student Owen who was going to night-track the badgers for the next two weeks. Our team also had tracking equipment. For the first time in their 18-month lives the badgers were free to go where they liked.

So, what would happen? Did they stay at their artificial sett home? Did they run

away and get lost? No they didn't. By the following morning only one was sleeping in the artificial sett, while the other four were all in an empty sett 100 metres up the hill (at location H). Within days they had discovered another sett about 100 metres down the hill (at location B).

We were still providing food and water to help them along as it was very dry up there at mid-summer. Over the first two weeks of their freedom Owen was able to report increased areas of exploration. Once Owen had completed his 2-week study, it was over to us to keep tracks on the badgers. At an early

stage badger No. 2 lost his transmitter, which was found on a footpath almost a kilometre from the release site, and we have not had any confirmed sightings of No. 2 since.

Over several weeks the badgers found their way to four setts that we knew about in the area, and went on to show the tracking team a further six setts, all previously empty as far as we know. It's just amazing how they've managed to do this. The badgers have not stayed together, but often the tracker teams were finding two badgers in one sett, and on the odd occasion all four. They seem to move from sett to sett regularly, sometimes to a different bed each day. Badger No. 5 took himself off to a new sett (previously unknown to us) about a kilometre from the release site and he seems to have found himself a permanent home. The photographic team discovered that he was with an un-collared badger that we believe to be a local resident.

It's coming up to Christmas. We know

exactly where badgers Nos. 3, 4 and 5 are; however, in the last few days No. 1 seems to have gone AWOL, but it may just be that the transmitter has failed or she is deep underground. We will continue to track where they are for as long as the equipment works and after that it will be down to looking for the usual signs. Perhaps there will be cubs next spring! The camera team certainly picked up some mating.

What have we learnt?

- After 18 months of captivity badgers can quickly start a natural wild life.
- When released they will find and utilise existing local setts.
- They do not need or even want to stay together as a bonded group.
- They will integrate with local badgers provided there are only a few around.
- It is well worth rehabilitating orphaned cubs.
- It is a rewarding thing to do.



Back in July, the badgers explore their new surroundings prior to full release.

Alan Johnson

[VISITS TO CULL ZONES continued from page 8]

another car park, which was considered safe to leave the cars. Off we went, a leader with his map, and we with our torches. We went along wide footpaths, narrow paths, overgrown paths. Steep, rocky, slippery – you name it, we walked on it and in the dark. Our circular route took us nearly five hours. We saw some lights which disappeared, but apart from that it was just a long walk in the dark. We did not mind. At least we knew that the badgers in that area were safe that night.

Gloucestershire

A few weeks later I went to join the Gloucester night patrols. This time I had visited a friend in the area and he took me to the meeting point, a car park near Stroud. We again split into groups and drove off. There was rain forecast, but when we set off it was dry. We stopped at a pre-arranged point and started off along a footpath, and close to a sett that had been targeted by cull shooters previously. Fortunately, some of the land near this sett was owned by a badger-friendly person, who allowed access to protestors.

By this time the rain had started, and we met a small group of dedicated people who were camping close to the sett all night, whatever the weather, to protect it. We reached a road and spoke to another group who advised us to go to a different area. By this time I was pretty wet, with even my best waterproof boots having let water in.

We met several police patrols, who sometimes followed us and sometimes spoke to us, although they were friendly and there was no animosity. I was surprised that none of the police were from Gloucestershire. During both night walks there were constant communications between the patrols and the organisers, passing on information about where shooting might be taking place. We finished around 2.30, soaking wet and tired.

I am full of admiration for these dedicated people from all walks of life who give up their time to help protect badgers from this unjust action by the government. They will certainly not give up and will be ready for any more badger killing in their area.

Please no badger culling in Surrey

A petition has been launched to ask Surrey County Council to make the decision to ban any badger culling on its land. The petition was set up independently and we had no knowledge of it, although of course we will support it. **The petition runs until 24 January**, and if the petition is heavily supported, then the council may debate and vote. This is not an absolute given, and no actual figures appear for the number of signatures required.

Just before Christmas a councillor put forward a motion in advance of the petition, to ask SCC to ban any future culling on its land. The motion was not carried, and the vote lost by a majority decision. Information on this vote is scarce, but I understand that it doesn't mean they will allow culling, just that they

won't say no at the moment. The whole thing is irrelevant, as the chances of badger culling coming to Surrey is virtually nil. The government is only choosing hotspot areas, where TB rates in cattle are extremely high. In Surrey we have very few cattle and no confirmed TB cases. I really don't know why Surrey County Council is wasting time on this subject. However, the petition and subsequent vote, if won, would send a message to the government that killing badgers is unpopular.

The petition is 'The Surrey County Council petition to disallow any future badger cull to take place on its land.' If you haven't already signed, it can be found on the website <http://petitions.surreycc.gov.uk/no-badger-culls/?signed=16f37884.08229c> Dave Williams

A BADGER SETT CLOSURE IN CAMBERLEY

Text and illustrations by Rodger Munt

Some members of the public are not aware of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and believe it's acceptable to fill in badger sett entrances, even when they're not on their own property, without seeking approval. However, a licence from Natural England is required and strict rules need to be rigorously applied to ensure the closure doesn't impact on the welfare of the badger. Unfortunately there are cases where, even when a licence has been granted, short cuts in the closure process have been taken by non-experts, with disastrous results for the badger social group. This article reports on a case where WSBG has been in full control of a sett closure in Camberley and explains the process.

To obtain a Natural England (NE) licence to close a sett one needs to demonstrate that:

- **the sett presents a safety/health risk to people and their property,**
- **there are no other practical methods for dealing with the problem and**
- **the licence action is likely to resolve the issues.**

It is also necessary to demonstrate that closing a sett will have

- **minimal impact on the resident badger population and**
- **any displaced badger will not cause problems elsewhere.**

This requires a detailed survey to be undertaken of the surrounding area to determine where there are other setts in the same clan territory and to determine the relationship between them. In those cases involving the closure of a main sett this might mean the building of an artificial sett for the displaced badgers at significant cost and effort. There is debate over the effectiveness of artificial setts, which is related to the research project described on pages 9 to 12.

The Camberley sett closure

Advice had been sought from WSBG by a homeowner in Camberley about a badger sett in his garden, where there was a single entrance on the property boundary with a tunnel which undermined some concrete steps in the neighbouring property. We deemed these steps, which were used to gain access to the upper levels of the garden, to be unsafe and at risk of collapse as they were structurally dependent on support from the underlying soil. The situation constituted a safety risk to people using the steps.

The sett entrance was monitored over several months and it was established, from badger signs and photographs, that the sett was in frequent although not daily use by badgers. This was evidently an active sett and we could not argue a case for sett closure without first establishing the consequences for the badger social group.

As no other setts had been previously recorded in the area it was necessary to conduct a thorough survey of the

surrounding area to determine if the sett was, as suspected, an outlier for a badger clan.

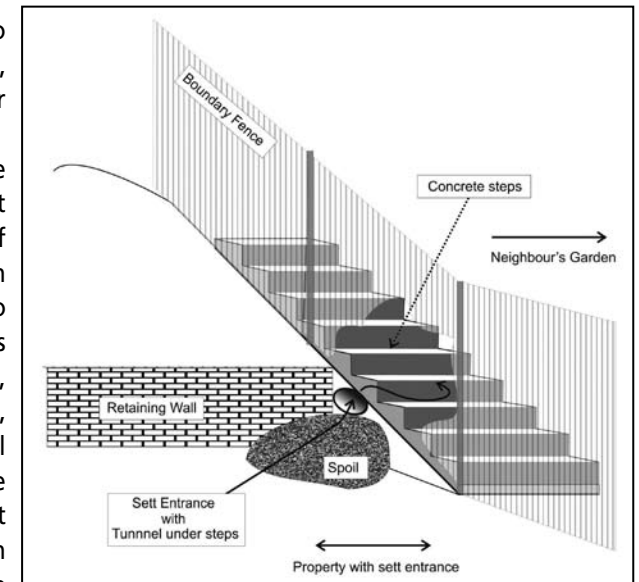
The survey revealed five previously unknown sett complexes, with a total of 54 entrances, within 150m of the sett that needed to be closed. One sett was identified as the main sett, by its active use and size, and there were several other outliers. Thus we could confidently say that the closure of the problem outlying sett would have minimal impact on the

The perilous steps in the Camberley garden.

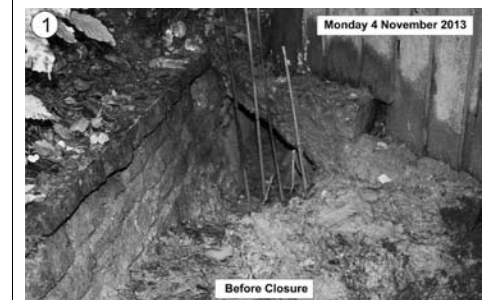
badger social group, as there was a main sett for any displaced badger to retreat to, and this was unlikely to cause a change in local badger activity.

It's a requirement for the owner of the property to apply for a licence to NE to close a sett, giving details of how the sett would be closed and identifying who would undertake the work; in this case WSBG would oversee the closure. The request was supported by a WSBG report that explained the need for sett closure, gave details of the survey and described how the sett would be closed. NE issued the licence on 4th November 2013 with a requirement that the sett closure would have to be completed by the end of that month, as no interference with a sett is normally accepted within the badger breeding season (from the beginning of December through to the end of June).

The sett closure requires the installation of a one-way badger gate at



each of the entrances, allowing a badger to exit but not enter, and the surrounding ground proofed, using heavy gauge chain-link fencing, to prevent badgers excavating a new entry or exit. The licence requires inspection of the gates and surrounding area for 21 days to ensure all badgers are able to exit and haven't re-entered. This monitoring was undertaken daily by the licence holder, and WSBG checked every three days. It's in this exclusion period when many problems can occur, e.g. with malfunctioning gates or with badger re-entry from an unexpected



direction. However, in this case the exclusion process went according to plan.

At the end of the 21 days, when we were sure that no badgers were in the sett, the gate was removed and the tunnel was filled with concrete to reinstate the integrity of the steps to the satisfaction of the neighbour.

The final task was to proof the area below ground using chain-link fencing to prevent further badger excavation under the steps. This was all completed before the deadline of 1st December 2013.

[This sett closure was exemplary, but we have many concerns over several other cases handled by Natural England. See the article below, as well as page 10 of our January 2013 newsletter outlining a botched closure in Great Bookham.]



Is Natural England neglecting its responsibilities?

Peter Eggleton

Sadly we have to accept that sometimes the living choices of badgers will come into conflict with less tolerant members of the public. We are of course grateful for the protection badgers are given in law which (in theory) ensures they will not be harmed if they are asked to move on. This is achieved with a licence system administered by Natural England (NE).

There have been a couple of situations this year which have led us to believe that NE is far too quick to issue total exclusion

licences without giving any consideration to where the badgers will go, nor to the knowledge and experience level of the licensees. Here are the two cases:

Farnham – October 2013

The first case is in a residential area of Farnham, with a sett in the garden. Badgers had dug two entrances with tunnels extending below a dwelling converted from a garage, and a third entrance in the middle of a grass-covered

pathway leading away from the garage. Two further entrances were in the adjacent bank and a little away from the garage and path.

The owners were concerned about the integrity of the garage structure and applied to NE for a licence. NE visited and declared that the sett should be totally closed and destroyed/covered up, and a licence was issued for that. They did not seemingly consider where the badgers would go.

The rudimentary gating instructions that accompanied the licence were not sufficient for the residents to be confident about doing the job. After they requested help, NE only provided a couple of internet references which led the residents nowhere. After a period of increasing desperation the residents found the West Surrey Badger Group and pleaded for help.

We evaluated the situation and agreed to assist if the job was limited to closing half the sett, which the residents were extremely happy with. We don't get involved in total sett closures where badgers are evicted without an obvious place of safety to go.

We closed three holes, leaving the other two alone, plus a third exposed from a collapsed entrance further along the path. The partial closure was straightforward and carried out without problems for the badgers or from the badgers. They were using the three open holes during the closure process, and are still there now the job is completed.

Shamley Green – October 2013

This is a sett in Shamley Green on the

garden boundary between neighbours A (friendly) and B (not so friendly), with at least one entrance on one side and another close to the boundary on the other side. The previous year West Surrey Badger Group had assisted neighbour A with some garden repairs which involved closing two tunnels (no entrances) under licence and restoring some structural integrity to the garden.

This year at the request of neighbour B, NE issued a licence for the total closure of the sett. Reluctantly, neighbour A agreed to a total closure because she could not see how the one-entrance situation was viable and, having a good understanding of badgers, realised they would need to make more entrances in her small garden. West Surrey Badger Group made representations to NE as to where the badgers would be expected to go. NE dismissed concerns, saying there were a few holes up the road on the other side. They did not seem to be concerned about potential third-party issues.

Neighbour B's agent, acting as licensee, and his contractors (two local builders) had no knowledge of badgers nor any experience of working on setts. NE no longer requires licenced personnel to have any experience at all. The whole episode was a catalogue of errors:

1. Two one-way gates were fitted to entrances, one of them totally in the garden of neighbour B's side, and the other with the tunnel aperture approximately 200mm into the garden of neighbour A's side. No internal or external indicator sticks were fitted. The gates fitted were not the type with a wire-mesh-

faced open central area on the flap, but were the type with a solid flap – these restrict airflow into the sett, seal off outside light and can be considered dangerous for the badgers and potentially problematic for the exclusion process.

2. Within two nights the badgers had re-entered the sett by digging into one of the tunnels extending under the lawn in the neighbour A's side. The licensee and NE were informed and eventually a third gate to cover the new hole was installed by the licensee's contractors. Again no internal or external indicator sticks were fitted. There was no evidence of anyone inspecting the gates for proper function and badger movements.
3. The gates were made with some precision with regard to the gap to the frame, and when it rained they became wet and the flaps seized. As a result the badgers had to dig themselves out of the tunnel system in neighbour A's side, leaving yet another access hole. The proper gate function was eventually recovered by the licensee's contractors.
4. There was a collapse of the tunnel just the sett side of the gate in neighbour B's garden, possibly as a result of the badgers weakening the whole area whilst digging themselves out. The gate was left askew and unable to function. For the remainder of the exclusion period this gate was not re-set and the collapsed tunnel area not addressed. Over the following weeks this gate

was covered with soil ejected by the digging badgers.

5. On 20th November, despite evidence that badgers were still occupying the sett, two gates were removed by the contractors (not the one buried in neighbour B's garden) and the entrances were filled in with breezeblocks, hard-core and soil. This was reported to NE as an emergency, who agreed that it should not have happened. As the licensee and contractors did not make themselves available, it was we who had to unblock the sett so that the badgers could escape. The badgers came out of the sett again on the second night.



Peter Eggleton

Breezeblocks, hardcore and soil had been used to fill the sett entrances. We had to dig it all out.

6. On 27th November, with badgers still evident in the sett, contractors began to push steel rods down into the sett area along the boundary fence line just inside neighbour B's garden. We urgently alerted NE to the possibility of trapping badgers underground again and even killing a badger. The contractor stopped work.

We will be requesting that Natural England reviews and revises its licensing procedures.

FOR EMERGENCIES CALL:

Your local Police Station / 999
Surrey Police Wildlife Crime Officer 0845 125 2222
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

BADGER TRUST

0845 828 7878
Website www.badgertrust.org.uk

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WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday March 25

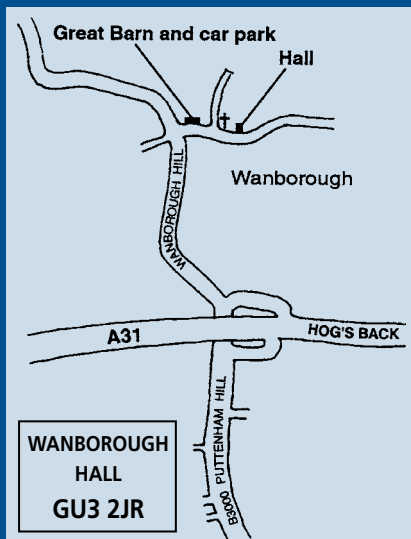
Alan Seymour, wildlife photographer

Alan is a very accomplished photographer, and a WSBG member. He has taken pictures of all types of British wildlife and, with partner Jan, will show us some of the best ones together with some DVD footage. Alan also travels abroad, and will show photos of more exotic species.

Tuesday April 22

Malcolm Clarke, beekeeper

Malcolm is treasurer of the Guildford division of Surrey Beekeepers Association, and has been keeping bees since around 1968. He will demonstrate a hive, how it works and how bees make the honey . . . and he'll bring some excellent locally made honey for us to buy.

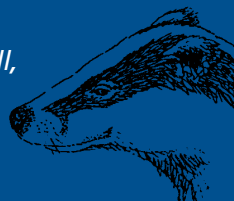


All evening meetings start at 8pm and are held in Wanborough Hall unless otherwise stated.

This is just off the A31 Hogs 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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