

# Badger Persecution PDG Newsletter

## Issue 3: October 2020



### Kevin Kelly – Chair BPPDG @NYAnimalCop



In February the face of normal changed significantly for all of us and what we had planned, well probably didn't

go as planned. The pandemic has left its mark on everyone, some more than others and I hope you're reading this with a sense of positivity that we can and will get through 2020 together.

The UK-BPPDG has also been impacted. We cancelled our April meeting and then moved online once we found our level again. We have all taken some extra personal responsibility to drive our strategy forward and it gives me great pleasure that on 6th October 2020 – National Badger Day – we will be launching our Badger Crime Tool Kit.

This is an initiative we put together as a group after looking at the national picture and listening to our valued Wildlife Crime Enforcers and partners across the UK. The toolkit will help uplift knowledge and give support, specifically around

interviewing suspects of badger crime. It also contains all the relevant details of the experts within the PDG who are on hand to advise, and gives an insight to the practical application of dealing with these crimes. In addition, we hope the content of the toolkit will support officers in investigating other wildlife crimes too.

In addition, we have provided some training to existing WCO's, upskilling our already competent officers and giving them the practical knowledge to manage crime scenes both in person or remotely. As well as reinforcing front line policing, this maximises opportunities to bring offenders to justice. We were lucky to capture this having a camera crew with us at the time (pre-lockdown) so watch out for a video produced by Nature Presenter – Mike Dilger, on behalf of the Badger Trust.

Anyway, enough from me. The other members of the group have some content for you. It's a pleasure to be able to try make a difference.

**Stay safe.**

### Social Media Accounts to Follow

- @NYAnimalCop** - Inspector Kevin Kelly, North Yorkshire Police
- @ukwildlifecrime** - UK National Wildlife Crime Unit
- @RSPCA\_Frontline** - RSPCA animal collection officers, animal welfare officers and inspectors
- @RuralCrimeTeam** - Dorset Police Rural Crime Team
- @Naturewatch\_org** - Naturewatch Foundation
- @LeagueACS** - League Against Cruel Sports
- @RSSS\_SCSImikeC** - Senior CSI, Mike Crockford
- @WYP\_CNewsome** - PC Caroline Newsome
- @BadgerTrust** - The Badger Trust
- @Craig\_wildlife** - Craig Fellowes, The Badger Trust

## Caroline Newsome - West Yorkshire Police



2020 hasn't quite been the year we were expecting! Plunged into a global pandemic, with coronavirus, and the subsequent lockdowns across the world. Worrying times for everyone, and the tragic loss of so many lives.

Our badgers, oblivious to the panic across the UK, carried on regardless, and for the police, well, it was 'business in the unusual'. A few weeks into lockdown, I took a call from a distressed member of the public, advising me that a large fire had been lit over the entrance to a badger sett. Calls like these, have a way of making my blood run cold... were the badgers okay? how bad was the damage to the sett?

I have to detach myself to a degree, and with 'police head on', I crack on and deal with it. I also keep an open mind, to who might be responsible.

I know the sett well, and like many setts, this one has been here for donkey's years, excavated by resourceful badgers, taking advantage of an old stoneworks, now a picturesque location, affording shelter, a nearby running stream, foraging ground, woodland, and a 'safe' place to raise cubs.

This sett is slightly different in that it's covered by 24-hour CCTV, which belongs to a nearby engineering works. Still, it doesn't stop my concern, as I jump in the police car, and drive to the area.

Upon arrival, I immediately see where the remnants of the fire are, charred remains of large branches, partially blocking the sett entrance. It looks a mess!

There are two further entrances to this sett, and I am relieved to see, there has been no disturbance to either of them. Just a small square of steel mesh, exposed on top of the well-worn earth, a reminder that the sett was a few years ago dug into by those that would wish the badgers harm. I dread to think what befell the badger/s who will have been dragged from his/her/their home, meeting their death, perhaps with a bullet, or horrifically baited with powerful dogs.

Following that particular attack, The Kirklees Badger Protection Group, ensured that this sett was impenetrable, hence the steel mesh.

Thoughts aside, and back to the job in hand - the fire.

I leave the sett, which is still showing signs of being active, fresh spoil around the other entrances, old bedding, (I smile at the image of seeing a badger having a clear out, and replacing old bedding, with new), fresh dung in nearby latrines, and walk to the nearby engineering works. I speak to my contact, a man who regularly views the badgers on his monitors, a lover of wildlife, and someone who does not see these stripy creatures, as anything other than beautiful animals that he takes pleasure in watching. The news is good, as he already has some footage of the fire, and allows me to view it.

I watch as two teenage boys appear on the screen and begin to build a fire in the sett entrance, gathering sticks and branches, as the flames get higher. This goes on for almost an hour, the fire being continuously fed with more fallen wood until the boys, perhaps bored, put it out with stones and leave.

Despite feeling angry at this stupidity and from previous experiences, it was clear, that the boys were clueless to the fact, their 'fire pit', was the doorway to the home of a wild animal. Badgers, in this case.

At no point did the boys show interest in the other sett entrances, (as if, for example, to attempt to smoke the badgers out), nor did they arrive at the sett with anything more than a man-bag and a bottle of pop... no spades, no dogs, no nets etc. They were definitely not 'tooled up'.

I returned to the station, and recorded a crime, under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and a couple of days later I landed on one of the boy's doorsteps. A worried 15-year-old stood before me, admitting that he had lit a fire in the wood, and had chosen somewhere 'safe' away from trees, in 'that hole that looks like a fire pit'. He had been bored and fed up of being stuck at home. Both he and his father were genuinely horrified when I told them that the pit was indeed a badger sett and albeit inadvertently, a wildlife crime had been committed.

I have always held the view that my job as a police officer isn't all about criminalising people. There are alternative ways to deal fairly and proportionately with all manner of incidents. After all, aren't we all allowed to make mistakes in order to learn?

On a cold spring morning I once again met with the boys and their parents, who stood shivering close to the badger's abode. We discussed all things badger, including the legislation that protects them, the horrors of badger baiting (which they didn't know existed), and they were

given a brief insight into a badger's life - in and around the sett and their territory.

Almost an hour later, and pleased that both boys, and their parents, had asked many questions, we all went our separate ways, and no doubt the badgers were pleased that all was silent up top - allowing them to continue with their daytime slumber.

Over the past few months, and possibly more so during lockdown, I have recorded a number of badger sett interferences, obstructions and blockages, and feel certain some are the work of young people, fed up with their gadgets and gizmos. They have taken to the great outdoors happily making cycle tracks, ramps and other

obstacles, to make the natural landscape that little bit more challenging, when riding their bikes.

Whilst not wishing to spoil this enjoyment, the fresh air and natural surroundings, I would ask that they think twice before digging into a banking, ripping out vegetation, or blocking a hole. Not least because they may be committing a wildlife crime which could lead to a criminal record, but more importantly for the sake of the wild animal whose home could be destroyed in the process.

## **Lockdown - have we seen an increase in the persecution of badgers?**

By Craig Fellowes. Wildlife Crime Officer & Trainer. The Badger Trust



If we look at the statistics for reports made to the Badger Trust and compare them to the same period in 2019 - so April to end August - then we see a 121% increase in reports of suspected levels of badger persecution.

Based on that statistic alone we see an increase. Firstly, and a key fact to consider, is that these reports are only reports made to the Badger Trust and do not reflect upon separate reports made direct to the police and RSPCA, and other agencies such as the League Against Cruel Sports and Naturewatch Foundation. So is the situation even worse?

Next we should look at other potential factors to consider, with one of these being a major factor in my opinion, which is that there has been a concerted effort by myself and the Badger Trust to encourage people and groups to report suspected crimes against Badgers to the police, and most importantly to the Trust through the online form. This has been done through education and a series of conference calls with badger groups, and was underway before lockdown training courses. This has proved successful and will benefit badgers.

The consequence of raising the awareness is we would naturally expect to see an increase in reporting. Another factor that needs to be considered is there have been more people out and about, enjoying our beautiful countryside, more walking and taking part in other country pursuits. People have become more aware of our valuable resources and spending time looking out for them. For some, having more time on their hands, has given them time to report matters.

So have we seen an increase? Yes we have statistically. Are we seeing an accurate reflection of the levels of the persecution that badgers face? No I do not believe so, and we are still not getting all reports, badgers are still being persecuted and their setts attacked. The police are still not getting all reports and we need people to report incidents.

Training will continue, despite the necessary restrictions brought about by the pandemic, and I can deliver a shortened, remote course to any police force if that assists. Any police force that would like training for the remainder of 2020, or into 2021, please get in contact with me at the Badger Trust at [craig@badgertrust.org.uk](mailto:craig@badgertrust.org.uk).

**Education for all is a key tool to use in tackling crimes against badgers.**

## Badger Persecution – Sett blocking and hunting with dogs.

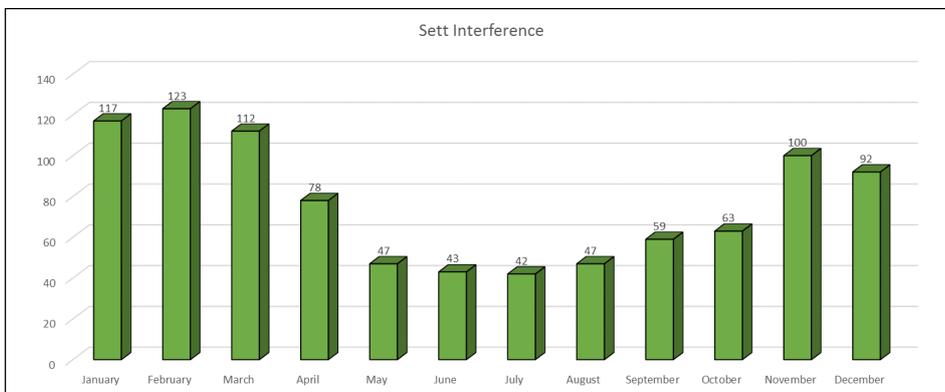
By Steve Harris, Head of Enforcement, League Against Cruel Sports

It is an offence under Section 3 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (PoBA) to interfere with a badger sett, and that includes obstructing sett entrances. Unfortunately, blocking or ‘stopping’ badger sett entrances is still regularly carried out illegally for the purpose of hunting with hounds and illegal field sports. This behaviour has a serious impact on badgers who are often below ground in their setts at the time the entrances are blocked.



When sett blocking is discovered it can be evidence of a decision having been taken in advance to hunt live foxes, even when the perpetrator is not seen doing it (R -v-Hopkins & Allen, 2011). Recent analysis by the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) of badger incident data over a two year period showed that 53% of illegal sett interference was caused by sett blocking.

Analysis of the dates of these incidents showed a clear correlation between sett interference, the fox cub hunting season (Aug – Oct) and the main fox hunting season (Nov – April):



It is imperative that sett blocking is reported promptly to the police and properly recorded if it is to be used in evidence to prosecute offenders, either for offences of Interfering with a Badger Sett or Hunting with Dogs, or both. Evidence that the sett is displaying signs

of current use by a badger is just as important and must be well documented, particularly if it is not possible to get an independent badger expert to examine the scene on the day of the offence. Clear, detailed photographs of the signs can also be shown to experts for the prosecution and defence after the event so they can give expert opinion about whether the sett was in current use, or not.

If anyone would like further information, advice on any hunting-related issue or to enquire about free training please get in touch: [steveharris@league.org.uk](mailto:steveharris@league.org.uk) - Tel 07980 234618.

Our ‘Guide to the Hunting Act’ is available free of charge, either in print or PDF format – just ask!

