WEST SURREY BADGER GROUP NEWS

AUTUMN 2026

DIARY DATES

MAKING SENSE OF BADGER SETTS - ONLINE TRAINING SESSION FROM THE BADGER TRUST

Wed 9th Dec, 7pm

Current & future Local Field Officers might be interested in this free online training session being offered by the Badger Trust.

Delivered by Suzie Melhuish from Blue Jay Ecology, the course will look at how we identify, classify & interpret badger setts, including the traditional sett classifications & how these compare with what we now know from research & field experience.

It will cover signs of activity, seasonal changes in sett use, territories & home ranges, & some of the common misconceptions that can make interpreting what we see above ground more difficult. It will be a really useful session to hep you better understand badgers, how they use their setts & what their behaviour tells us.

You can register your place here.

CHAIR'S REPORT

The drought over the summer made really difficult conditions for wildlife. Evidence of how hard it has been for badgers appeared in late August & early September when I attended several badger rescues. I picked up 6 collapsed cubs, all weighing less than 4.5 kilograms - they seemed to have stopped growing at about half size & there were several who were suffering seizures. I suspect that finding food for these cubs was **so** difficult they were eating anything they came across, including poisonous substances. Only 1 of these poor cubs survived to join the orphan group at Wildlife Aid. Happily, she is now living in Sussex having been released with two others into a specially prepared site.

The arrival of Autumn has brought with it the usual stream of enquiries from people experiencing lawn damage, including the classic for one person who had laid a nice new shiny turf containing a whole larder of badger food in his back garden, & the badgers completely trashed it!

The never-ending building programme continues to be of concern. There are many proposed housing projects all over Surrey, putting a considerable number of setts at risk of closure & badgers losing valuable habitat. This will only increase conflict situations between badgers & local residents.

I would like to get more members involved with WSBG activities so will be organising further sett checking days in the New Year. I will also explain in more detail field officer roles & hope that more members will feel confident enough get more involved in the protection of badgers as threats arise.

With very best wishes,

Pete Eggleton
Acting Chair, WSBG

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Thank you to all our members who have renewed their membership – your support really makes a difference. If you haven't already, please consider setting up a **standing order**. This saves us the administration work involved in sending reminders, and should make life easier for you too. You can cancel at any time by contacting your bank.

Our membership rates are:

Single/Family: £10.00
Senior Citizen/Unwaged: £7.00
Under 18's: £5.00

And our bank account details are:

West Surrey Badger Group
The Co-operative Bank
Account No: 65427110
Sort Code: 08-92-99

If you have any membership queries, please just get in touch via the email below.

wsbgmembers@gmail.com

Jennie
(Membership Secretary)

The Cat Flap Rattlers

Karen Cobbett, WSBG member

We live on the edge of north Surrey where the urban area known as Folly Hill meets miles of farmland and countryside. Over 25 years, we have built up a relationship with the local badger residents and today have a group of approximately 6 that pass through our garden every evening to eat a generous scoop of dry dog biscuits thrown out on the lawn before they go out foraging.

This summer was incredibly tough for them as the rock hard ground became so very difficult to forage for worms and other regular food, so a little more "help" was provided together with a large bowl of water that had to be filled every night. If we should be late in the dog biscuit delivery they have learned to take it in turns to come up to the cat flap and give it a good rattle, then politely step back and wait for biscuits to appear!

The two photos show the "cat flap rattlers" after they have done their job waiting at the door, and then four of the group grazing on biscuits on the lawn. The installation of a wildlife camera outside has provided evidence of this behaviour from the badger's point of view and it is fascinating to see them take it in turns to come up to rattle the cat flap while the others sit back along the hedge. If the first one does not succeed another one steps forward to do a better job, until the door opens and biscuits arrive! Once the biscuits are eaten they quietly move off into the hedge and go about their badger lives, but this top up was certainly a life saver this summer.



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Diary of a Local Field Officer
Closing a badger sett

by Paul Collett

It was after a storm with torrential rain & high winds that we received a phone call from a near neighbour. When I say we, I mean the board of our residential management company, of which I'm the Director for Nature Conservation & Head Ranger of the surrounding ancient woodland nature reserve. We have over 1200 flora & fauna species recorded across the reserve & our key mammal species is the badger. The sett & sub-setts recorded by Dr Rodger Munt (as sett A091 in the WSBG database) has over 100 entrances, with 10-15 active during recent surveys.

In this instance, a large limb from a sweet chestnut tree had fallen onto the neighbour's garden fence & wall, causing a lot of damage. As owners of the woodlands & trees, any damage caused to property is our responsibility so I was called in to assess the damage & begin the task of getting tree & fencing contractors in for repairs. It was during my first visit to his garden & as the local WSBG field officer, I asked a simple question, "Do you have any animal entrances in your garden?", "Yes" came the reply, "do you want to see them". Of course I did, as I knew no entrances were documented for this garden. When we got to the area of 3 visible holes, the whole area was covered in wire, fixed to the ground… worse still there was barbed wire running through the area above the holes, so any animal exiting from the holes could have been badly injured. I could also see from the entrance shapes that these were not fox den holes so my first instinct was to read him the "riot act" & report him to the local wildlife crime officers for interference with a badger sett. Of course, I was there to repair the damaged fence so needed to be a bit more diplomatic about how to handle the situation!

Instead, I informed him of my Field Officer role at WSBG, calmly explained why this was not legal, explained the Protection of Badger Act 1992 &, in particular, why it's illegal to damage or obstruct access to the sett. Furthermore, I made it made completely clear that this was a **prosecutable offence**. I also explained that he could apply for a licence to close these entrances if he really was against their presence. As I manage the nature reserve & know A091 very well, I knew the nearest main sett entrances & any nearby sub setts. These holes were either an outlier of A091 or a new sett, so my reckoning at that time was they may only have been periodically used (before they were wired over), but were not a sett or clan in their own right. After explaining this & asking him to remove the ground wire and barbed wire (which he did whilst I was there) I contacted Pete Eggleton.

As mentioned, my primary concern was not to try to turn someone's hatred into a tolerance for wildlife, it was to protect the badgers & other animals I knew lived in our woodlands behind that garden. So, Pete & I agreed that WSBG should assist the householder with applying to Natural England for a sett closure licence. The process was started in April, with me acting as the elected ecologist for the application. Sett closure licensing applications are only allowed to be submitted during July 1st to November 30th each year so we had time to get all the evidence together. I was able to visit the garden fairly regularly during this time to progress the fence & wall repairs & appoint tree contractors to make the sweet chestnut tree safe. So, I was able to check on any new interference with the sett entrances. We applied on July 1st & received confirmation of the application with further information required. The application proposed a sett closure to prevent serious damage to land, crops or any other form of property under section 10(2)(b) Protection of Badgers Act (1992), consisting of 3 entrances, described as a non-primary, outlier sett. The following activities were required during the 21-day inspection period.

- One-way gates installed in each entrance, which I did on his behalf;
- Marker sticks laid across the entrances on both sides of the gates, included when I installed the gates;
- Motion cameras installed targeting each gate for the complete period, which the owner provided;
- Inspection of camera footage & entrances every 3 days & a full review at the end of the period;
- Final report & footage collated for Natural England.

SEASONAL TIPS & ADVICE FOR THE AUTUMN

Badgers reach their heaviest weights in late autumn as they feed intensively on earthworms, fallen fruit, berries, & insect larvae (such as chafer grubs).

They roam more widely around the countryside & suburban edges to find food, increasing the frequency of nocturnal foraging.

Autumn triggers a secondary peak in road accidents involving badgers as they cross paths to feed & mate.

Slow down around dusk & dawn on country lanes. Continue to report road casualties & injured badgers to us or the local group to where you are.

Remember, you can use the free Badger Trust "Badger Watch" smartphone app when out & about. Download it here.

WSBG Emergency Mobile: 07726 929681

Following this, a method statement compiled by myself & the householder provided all the details of how we would close this outlier was submitted & subsequently the A01 badger licence application was duly agreed by Natural England.

Works were carried out to backfill the entrances with earth surrounding the entrances, provide a layer of buried chain link fencing & further filled with top soil to a suitable depth to return the area to grass. All works were carried out using hand tools only, & we further agreed on animal proofing the garden perimeter to ensure badgers could not regain access to the garden. This installation will be monitored by myself for a period of 5 years & any badger incursions or evidence of new entrance diggings will be reported by the owner.

At the end of this process, I am happy to say our neighbourly relationship is in good order & they know that I'm not that far away should they have issues with badgers again. In the meantime, the badger clan in our nature reserve continues to live happily, and although numbers have reduced, they still produce cubs each year.

WE LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

A big thank you for all your contributions to this issue of the WSBG newsletter. We LOVE getting your stories & photos, so please keep sending them in for publication in the next edition via wsbgcomms@gmail.com and mark your email NEWSLETTER.

The deadline for submitting content for the winter newsletter is Wednesday 20th January 2027.

SITUATION VACANT
CHAIRPERSON FOR THE WSBG

WSBG continues to look for someone to take on the role of Chair. If you think this is something that interests you or you know someone who would like to take up the reins, please get in contact. It is a voluntary role, with any expenses reimbursed & requiring a commitment of no more than 2-4 days per month.

Further details about the role , including a job description and person specification, can be requested via contactwsbg@gmail.com.

GALLERY

Thank you for sending in your photos of badgers, we love to receive them! Please continue to send them to us via wsbgcomms@gmail.com so they can be included in future newsletters.

WSBG members have had some amazing garden visitors this summer ...





Photo credits © Kathryn Killner

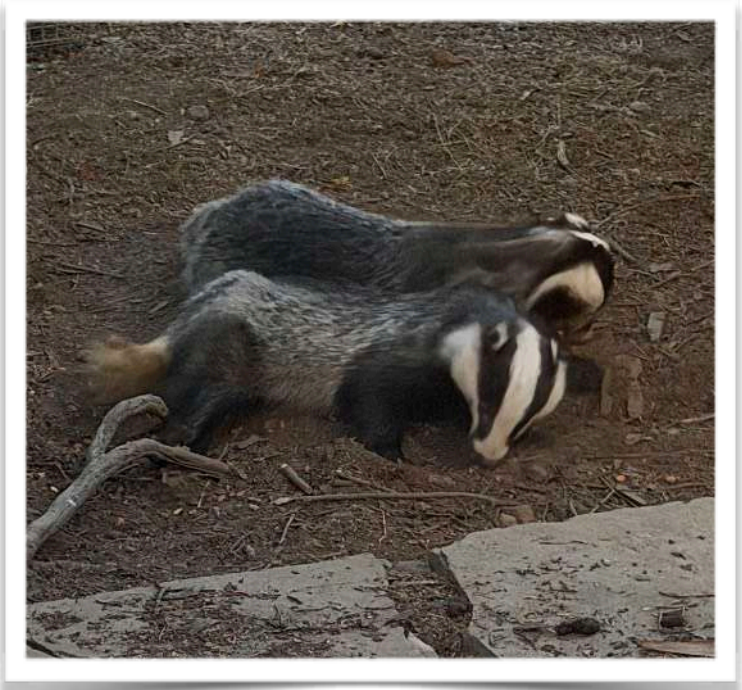
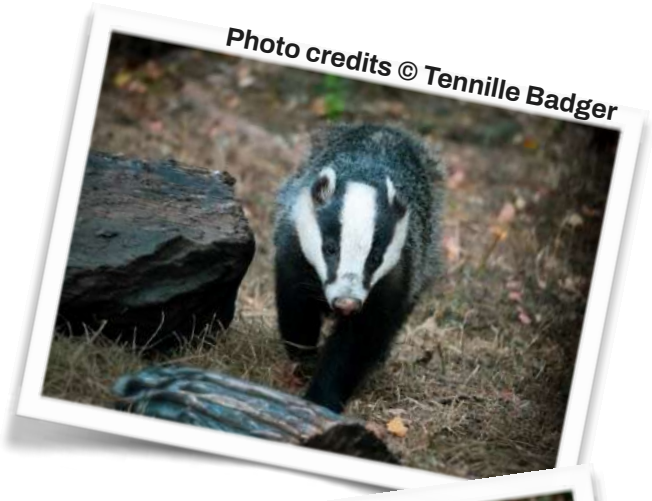


Photo credit © Andy Ayres

A long, hot summer at the Tankersford hide

By Brendon Hollands









Although our hide on the RSPB reserve at Tankersford, near Tilford, was built back in 2021, this year was the first we really made full use of it, taking members of the public down for badger watches. This was almost entirely down to the re-vamping our archaic website, and ensuring that we now appear on internet searches. If you Google “Badger watching in Surrey”, the WSBG hide now comes up at the top of the list, which has led to far more enquiries than we had anticipated.

We did a few ad hoc watches in May (one for another regional badger group), and then had a bit of a lull before starting things in earnest in the summer, setting up and advertising a series of dates on the website. The first session in late July had to be postponed due to being in the middle of one of those heatwaves (that seem such a distant memory now!), so we didn’t get going until early August. Eventually we ended up doing 9 evenings in total, before ending our sessions in late September. This was more than we had originally planned to do, as we had to add in several extra dates to try and accommodate all the enquiries that we had.

The evenings, thankfully, had a 100% success rate, with at least 2 badgers seen at every watch. The extremely hot, dry summer meant that the badgers were very hungry, emerging much earlier than usual, and they were often already out when we arrived at the hide.

In total we had 53 people visit the hide, ranging in age from 8 to 70, some from as far afield as Kent, and even one couple from Australia, in the UK visiting family. Many of the visitors were seeing a live badger for the first time and were thrilled to see the badgers coming so close to the hide.

Although the volume of enquiries was initially a logistical challenge for our very small volunteer team, it has been more than worth the effort & free time given over all. We already have a waiting list for 2027 when we start our badger watching sessions again in the spring, and look forward to allowing many more people a glimpse into the world of these beautiful animals.

Find more info on booking your visit in 2027 here.

A THANK YOU FROM THE WILDLIFE AID FOUNDATION

The Wildlife Aid Foundation is delighted to work alongside the West Surrey Badger Group, helping to provide care and treatment for injured and orphaned badgers brought into our wildlife hospital.

The recent generous donation of £1500 from WSBG will continue to help towards the costs of veterinary treatment, medication, food, and ongoing care for badgers in our rehabilitation programme, helping them get back to the wild where they belong.

Many thanks,

Alice Serras-Carroll
General Manager
Wildlife Aid Foundation



A Day Out For Sett Survey Training

By Pete Eggleton

Five of us met up at the recently re-opened Roman Temple car park at Farley Heath for a morning sett surveying session, and I would like to thank Margie, Sue, Tennille & Steve for coming along. We walked a pre-planned route taking in five setts. Our first two setts were somewhat disappointing with the appearance of being only partially used, but it became more interesting after coffee and scones at Sue's place when we visited our third sett of the morning. On the side of a trackway and a field boundary it had twelve very well used holes showing all the signs of current use: clean entrance holes (one with expelled bedding), clean spoil heaps, pathways going between the holes and going off into foraging routes, footprints and hairs on spoil heaps and even a couple of field entrances. There was a clear pathway from sett entrances going down the side, across the sunken trackway and up the other side to the fields beyond. Sett 4 about 100 meters away was also in use and obviously owned by the same group of badgers. Away from the setts everyone was practicing their field craft discovering foraging routes and dung pits.

There must be in excess of 1500 setts in the west side of Surrey, many of which have not been looked at and properly recorded for decades. Sett checking outings give us the opportunity to enjoy a nice walk around in the countryside whilst on a specific mission to look at setts. I will be looking to organise a few more in the New Year.



Sett records & reporting road casualties

By Brendon Hollands

As you may be aware, the West Surrey Badger Group has a database of known sett locations in the county, and also keeps a record of locations where badgers have been hit by cars on the road (unfortunately most frequently these are fatalities).

Sett locations

We keep a record of sett locations for a couple of important reasons.

Firstly, if a sow is killed on the road in the spring, it is possible that she had young cubs in a nearby sett that have been orphaned.

Therefore, whenever we hear of a reported road fatality in the spring, we will try and check the body to see if it was a sow in milk, and if so, check if we have a record of a sett nearby. If we do, we can visit and monitor that sett over the next few days to see if there are any signs of distressed cubs that can be rescued.

Secondly, we are often contacted by ecology companies who will ask us if we have any records of badger setts within a certain radius of a proposed new development. If we can alert them to setts close to a proposed development that can be included in their ecology reports, there is a greater chance that the setts can be protected.

Even if we are not asked for information by the ecology company, if we are aware of a proposed development, and know that there are badger setts on the site or nearby, we can raise our own objections to the development.

We have recorded locations of approximately 1600 setts in Surrey, which, whilst that sounds like a substantial number, we believe is only a fraction of the actual number of setts in the county. We really can't begin to estimate how many more setts there may be out there, as a lot of land area in our county is large private gardens or private estates, which are impossible to survey. Even publicly accessible land can hold setts in inaccessible areas, or hidden under heavy undergrowth, and some areas may just have never been surveyed. When we do make a concerted effort to survey a specific area we already have some records for, we often find new setts that aren't on our existing records.

Therefore, we would ask that if you know of any sett locations in your local patch, that you let us know by emailing wsbgrecords@gmail.com. If we don't know of it, we can add it to our records, and even if we are aware of it, it is useful to get updated information on whether it is still looking active. Many of our sett records date back to the 1980's and haven't been updated since.

Badger road casualties

Recording locations of badgers involved in collisions with cars is also important, as if there are a number of fatalities recorded in the same stretch of road, we can lobby a local council to provide signage to warn drivers to slow down, or to install reflectors to alert badgers to oncoming traffic.

Also, as already referred to, if we are aware of a badger fatality in the spring, we can check to see if it was a lactating sow, and check for orphaned cubs.

One other potential benefit of recording these incidents is that it could give some clues over time to changes in the badger population in the county.

We now keep a log of road traffic incidents involving badgers on a shared google sheet that various committee members can access and add to. The locations, along with all our known sett locations, are also recorded on an OS map overlay, to help us easily see a pattern of multiple accidents in the same, or similar location.

In 2025, we recorded 103 incidents, of which unfortunately around 90% were dead. This year we have so far 81 recorded incidents, of which only 4 were alive.

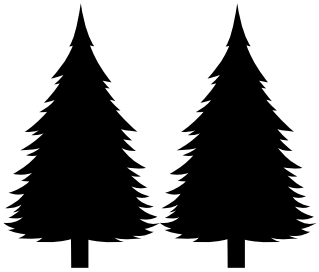
As with sett locations, we believe there may be many more road casualties that go unrecorded, so if you do see a badger casualty by the road, please report it to us as soon as safely possible.

BADGER TRUST NEWS IN BRIEF

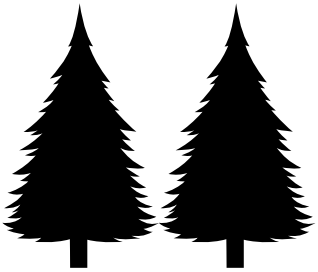
Badger Trust urges England to follow the Welsh approach to tackling bTB.
For years, Wales has made progress on bovine TB without following England's path of widespread badger killing. Since 2010, bTB herd incidence in Wales has fallen by 44%, without a badger cull, and nearly 96% of herds are now officially TB-free. Read more about why the Badger Trust is advocating for this approach to be continued in Wales & followed elsewhere across the UK **here**.

Stop the badger blame game
Badger Trust CEO Nigel Palmer looks at how England's badger culls have been divisive for thirteen years, affecting farming communities as well as our native wildlife. More than 50% of the last estimated badger population has been killed to tackle bovine TB in cattle. But after 254,038 badgers have died, has this approach been effective? Read his full commentary **here**.

Sign up for the latest Badger Trust news straight to your inbox **here**.



Already thinking about Christmas gift buying? Lots of badger-themed present ideas can be found in the Badger Trust shop **here**.



CONTACT INFORMATION

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Police 999
Surrey Police (Wildlife Crime) Call 101 to report an incident and ask for the Wildlife Crime Officer to be made aware. Make sure you get a Crime Reference Number.
Wildlife Aid (Leatherhead)
Emergency Helpline 01372 360404 or www.wildlifeaid.org.uk
RSPCA 0300 1234 999
WSBG 07726 929681 To report dead/injured badgers, suspicious behaviour, or organise a rescue.

WSBG COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Acting Chair (Pete), (wsbgchair@gmail.com)
Treasurer (Brendon)
Secretary (Nicola), (wsbgsec@gmail.com)
Membership Secretary (Jennie), (wsbgmembers@gmail.com)
Communications Officer/Newsletter Editor (Clare), (wsbgcomms@gmail.com)

General WSBG enquiries, training, badger-watching etc
contactwsbg@gmail.com