

# **Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association**

Minutes of the meeting to discuss Badgers on the allotment site  
held at 6.00pm on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at Saintbridge Rugby Club.

## **ATTENDEES**

Stephen Simpson (Chairman (plot 86), Bert Newman (plot140A), John Merrick (plot 85B), Karen Franks (plot 66 B & 67B), Chris Ellicott (plot 54B), Jan Broadway (plot 107B), Andy Barrett (plot 62B), Paul Wildgoose (plot 87A), Jon & Ginny Dickinson (plot 71A), C Dyke (plot 8A), Alan Cursue (plot 107B), Frank Prentice (plot 43B), Paul Wheatley (plot 19B&C), Karen & Chris Russell (plot 10A), G Allen (plot23A&B), Sandy Gornall & Bruno Sabin (plot 96A), Andy Hedges (plot33A&B), Derrick Brown (plot 87B & 85A), Cen ap Dalydd (plot 61B), Anderson Jules (plot 12A), Adrian Coward (ecologist), and Theresa Watt (Gloucester City Council).

## **1 Welcome and introduction.**

The Chairman Steve Simpson welcomed all those present and introduced the expert ecologist Adrian Coward. Apologies were received from Liz Macdonald, Tracey Simpson, Helen Dallyn and Dave Johnson.

## **2 Presentation of findings**

Adrian gave an overview of his findings from the field visit prior to the meeting. The main points were as follows:

The main sett looks to be well established and is in the bank of an old field boundary hedgerow. The soil is easy to dig making this an ideal location for Badgers. The subsidiary sett on plots 8A & 7A is currently active. Holes in the pathway between plots 9B and 12A are not badger holes and can be filled in as they are a danger to public safety.

It is likely the main sett was originally a subsidiary sett when the badgers were mainly in the woodland area to the northern side of the site. Antisocial behaviour could well have displaced the main sett from this location to its current location.

Badgers live in social groups, typically 3 or 4 animals or sometimes up to 8 or 10. They are territorial animals, their territory can range from as little as 200 square metres up to 2 kilometres. They scent mark their territory to keep other badgers out although there is some migration and integration between social groups.

Badgers will have a main sett where they have their cubs and spend most of their time. This can have an annex sett if there is an obstacle below ground preventing excavation. They have a number of subsidiary setts which are used seasonally and often associated with a food source. They can also dig a small hole to sleep in and this is used when they are scent marking their territory.

The badger population is limited by food supply and it is only the dominate female that will breed in a sett. The population tends to increase until it reaches the limit of food supply and then decline. This cycle of population increase and decline is usually over a period of 15 years.

Looking at the kind of problems the badgers are causing it is extremely unlikely a licence would be given to close the sett. Moving a badger sett is a very expensive exercise and involves building an artificial sett, located in the badger's territory, for them to move into. The old sett is fitted with one-way doors and protected with heavy gauge mesh, so they cannot dig their way back in. Once the move is complete the old sett is fenced off to prevent re-entry. A licence to close a sett is only given when there is a danger to public safety. Examples include, undermining the foundations of motorways, railway lines and buildings.

The Badger Trust have been carrying out what is called distraction feeding. Giving small amounts of food around the sett so the badgers are less likely to damage crops when they roam their territory.

If other solutions to crop damage have been offered but not taken up it raises the question just how serious the problem is for you.

### 3 Questions and discussion

Steve opened the meeting to questions and discussion from the floor.

Why are badgers protected? This is because they are a persecuted species. It can be argued that other species are under protected. With the expansion of the human race wildlife was driven out of towns and cities and now they are moving back as there is nowhere else for them to go.

Will the badgers move back to the woodland area? This is unlikely as the main sett is well developed. The woodland area is still part of their territory and is a valuable food source in dry or frosty weather when the ground is too hard for them to feed in other areas.

How much do badgers eat? Very little, they are not the sort of animal that needs to eat its own body weight to survive. The distraction feeding is literally a few peanuts and a bit of fruit. If they are fed too much they can get used to it and if the feeding stops they will devastate the surrounding area.

There was a long discussion on the problem of badgers digging holes and how this could be a danger to public safety. The general advice given was: If you can see the end of the hole, then it should be filled in as soon as possible. If you cannot see the end of the hole it has to be monitored to make sure it is empty. This can be done by placing sticks over the entrance. If they are not disturbed after 21 days the entrance can be loosely filled with soil and left for another 21 days. If there is no disturbance after 42 days the hole can be filled in.

The use of fencing to protect crops was discussed. Two types of fencing can be used electric or permanent fencing. Permanent fencing should use heavy gauge mesh and be of solid construction. The fence should be four-foot-high and buried two foot deep in the ground with one foot of fencing laid flat in the bottom of the trench forming an L shape.

Electric fencing can be made from wooden batons and short lengths of plastic pipe for the insulators. Three strands of wire are used, the first 10 cm off the ground, the second 20cm off the ground and the third 30cm off the ground. Do not use electric fence netting for sheep or rabbits as the badgers can get caught up in it. The major cost with electric fencing is the battery and transformer, typically £200.00. Several plots could be fenced collectively to share the cost. The fence line has to be kept free of vegetation to prevent it from shorting out.

The use of male urine is a common myth and not found to be effective.

What is the impact of badgers on other wildlife particularly hedgehogs? Badgers and hedgehogs compete for the same food source and badgers will kill hedgehogs, although this is not common. Hedgehog skins turned inside out indicate predation by badgers. The main factors for the decline in hedgehogs are the loss of hedgerows and use of pesticides and slug pellets. It is recommended to use environmentally friendly slug pellets [*slug pellets containing Ferric Phosphate*] and apply them as directed scattered thinly and not put in piles. Examples of people using rat bait around a sett have been found and this kills more dogs and cats than badgers.

What predators do badgers have? Humans are the only predator with most animals being killed by cars. This is estimated to be around 50,000 a year. New roads and alteration works incorporate underpasses and flyovers for wildlife where necessary.

How do you get a licence to move badgers? Licences are issued by Natural England. There is no fee but you have to prove competency and have the necessary equipment and procedures to carry out the work correctly. Licences are only issued for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> November.

There was a long discussion about damage to crops. Except for peas and sweetcorn, the badgers are not interested in the crops themselves but are after grubs or insects. It was noted that some crop losses to wildlife are to be expected. A poll of those present indicated that around 25% had experienced badger activity. One plotholder had severe damage whilst two plotholders said they had no damage. One plotholder lost unprotected peas and sweetcorn whilst another was able to harvest sweetcorn for the first time this year. The issue of whether distraction feeding around the sett is concentrating the problem for a few plotholders was discussed. The distraction feeding could be stopped to see if it makes any difference but it would be a good idea to map the areas experiencing problems beforehand.

Would the badgers be moved if the area was developed for housing? This is unlikely as the old hedgerow is a valuable habitat for many species. It is common nowadays for housing development to design in corridors for wildlife and preserve areas of valuable habitat. In this respect street lighting is a very important consideration.

How far do badgers roam? This is likely to be the whole of the allotment site and woodland area.

Do badgers dig when they are feeding? Not usually, they suck up earthworms from the soil surface, although they will dig to get at grubs in the soil.

#### **4 Conclusions and actions identified**

Steve brought the meeting to a close by summarising the main conclusions and actions identified, which were as follows:

It will not be possible to get a licence to move the badger sett as the type of damage caused is not a public safety issue. The costs of such an operation is also prohibitive.

Holes in pathways and on allotment plots should be filled in as soon as they appear provided you can see the end of the hole, if not, the hole needs to be monitored to make sure it is empty.

Permanent or electric fencing can be used to protect crops if desired. Details of appropriate construction will be distributed.

Plotholders should expect some degree of crop losses due to wildlife, be it badgers, pigeons, foxes, slugs etc. Plotholders experiencing serious damage due to badgers should consider a plot move.

With the assistance of plotholders, information will be collected to map the extent and severity of badger activity across the allotment site.