

ADVISORY INFORMATION – BADGERS



Badger emerging from its sett and feeding (© V Hutchin)

Badgers live in family groups of usually between 5 and 12 individuals which may inhabit several underground burrows or 'setts' within their territory. There will be a single main sett, which has an average of 12 entrances. There can be additional secondary setts, often connected to the main sett by worn paths.

Key Points

- Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.
- **It is an offence to wilfully kill, injure or take a badger; to interfere with a sett by damaging or obstructing it or by disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett, with intent or recklessly.**
- Crucially, badgers do not need to be present at the time of inspection for the sett to be protected.
- The breeding season, December-June, is when badgers are most sensitive to disturbance
- A minimum protection zone of 20m, increasing to 100 m for blasting or vibration
- It is a legal offence to damage to setts and the limited exceptions to this protection require a licence to be obtained

Badger Setts and Quarries

A sett can be identified by a D-shaped tunnel with evidence of external latrines and tracks. The tunnels can extend up to 20m from an entrance and can run very close to the surface e.g. 60cm. Signs of occupation include hairs, discarded bedding and scratching posts around entrances.

Most quarry operations can be carried out without interference to badger setts, provided they are carefully planned and supervised. Information on the location and occupancy of badger setts should be recorded by the quarry manager and kept in the site records.



Disturbance to badgers should be reduced by **timing quarry operations near setts to avoid the badgers' breeding season** wherever possible. Badgers are most sensitive during the breeding season, from December until June. Disturbance during this time can cause cubs to be abandoned.

Prior to any work commencing in the vicinity of a sett, site managers should draw the attention of the staff, contractors or others who will carry out the work to its presence. The sett should normally be marked with brightly coloured nylon rope or similar, so that the boundary of the marked area is at least 20 metres away from any entrance to the sett which is believed to be in current use. Protection zones around setts should be a minimum of 20m radius, with operations involving blasting and vibrations this should be extended to 100m, together with careful timing of operations.

Badger populations fluctuate, with new setts being excavated and old ones being deserted. Before planning quarry activities in an area where badgers are present it may be necessary to assess whether setts are inhabited.

Learning Points

Signs which suggest an occupied badger sett:

- The inner tunnel will be a D-shape, the shape of the entrance is irrelevant.
- Badger footprints, clawmarks and smoothed soil may be visible around the entrance
- Badger hairs will be evident near entrances, these are coarse black hairs with grey banding.
- Soil and discarded bedding/ vegetation heaps will be found near entrances
- Tracks from the main sett to other smaller setts in the area
- Dung pits or latrines and sometimes scratching posts may be seen near entrances or along tracks to other setts

Methods for confirming habitation of a sett:

- Sticky tape around entrance to collect hairs for identification
- Sand or soil sprinkled around entrance to collect paw prints

These may need to be left for several weeks in cold weather, as the badgers will be less active and will need to be checked weekly.

Where doubt remains about whether setts are in current use by badgers, it is better to err on the safe side by seeking advice, rather than to proceed with a potentially damaging quarry operation and risk creating an offence.

Should you require specific badger advice contact the Badger Trust www.badgertrust.org.uk