

# Operation Meles

Partners working together to combat badger persecution  
by gathering intelligence and targeting offenders

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## Badger digger tagged and under curfew

In March 2013 a report was received of two persons digging at a sett at Over Dinsdale near to the river Tees. Police attended and the location was pointed out. The sett was situated in a hedge line approx. 100 yards from the end of a field towards the river bank. Unfortunately the officers who could see two persons digging at the sett but could only get so far before being seen themselves. As the officers approached the two males ran off towards the river and one male was seen to ford the river leaving his cross bull lurcher dog on the riverbank. The other male was not seen. Back at the sett three crowning holes had been dug and spade and clothing had been left.

The accused was identified through his dog which he had lost on a previous suspected poaching incident when it was seized and returned to him. DNA on the clothing was his. He was also seen nearby at another sett further down the river an hour before. He was also identified by County Durham Police officers.

The accused received a 3 month curfew to stay at an address between 7pm and 7am being monitored via a tag plus £400 of costs and fines.

## Suspended sentences for badger hunting gang

Three males appeared in court as a result of an incident in May 2013 and were found guilty of attempting to take a badger, digging for badgers and interfering with badger setts. The gang who had targeted a south Staffordshire badger sett were arrested after being spotted after two of the gang were seen lying face down beside a badger sett. A fourth male made good his escape

They were sentenced at Cannock Magistrates Court on Thursday 28th November, and received eight months in jail, suspended for 18 months. They were also handed an 18-month community order and told to complete 120 hours unpaid work.



## **Two found guilty at Leeds**

Police caught two people actively engaged in digging out a badger sett. Whilst one made off from the scene the other, a woman, was caught at the locus. Whilst the police were at the scene a Jack Russell terrier wearing a radio collar emerged from the sett. Both the accused subsequently denied badger related charges at an earlier hearing. However both defendants DNA was found on beer cans at the scene along with spades.

They were found guilty after a one day trial at Leeds Magistrates court on 4th December 2013. They were both convicted of interfering with a badger sett and fined £260. It is thought that this may be the first time a woman has been convicted of this type of crime.

## **UK Wildlife Crime Priority 2014—2016**

Badger persecution is to remain as a UK Wildlife Crime Priority from 2014—2016. It is hoped that over this period a clearer picture can be formed of exactly what is happening with badgers and persecution throughout the UK. It is already clear that the level of persecution continues unabated and that further action will have to be taken to identify offenders and target them with a view to prosecution. This will be no easy task given that more than 50% of all offences are committed by persons and in a manner where it is impossible to gather intelligence to inform police on how to target the offenders. There is no doubt that in common with many other types of wildlife offences the offenders are often involved in other types of criminality. Badger baiting incidents both at the sett and away from it continue to be regularly reported and it is those people who hopefully can be targeted by forming robust intelligence packages. Please ensure that any intelligence gathered on likely offenders makes it way to The NWCUC who have the lead role in gathering intel on this subject.

## **2013 Incidents**

Operation Meles has been monitoring and recording incidents for some time now and our initial analysis shows 663 incidents were recorded during 2013. That is by no means all the incidents as many, whilst recorded at a local level, will not have been passed to us. We would appeal to anyone who becomes aware of an incident to report it to us by using the Scottish Badgers website reporting button “Report a dead badger/incident” which automatically sends an email to us. There is no need for a password or user Id so anyone can access and report incidents and although we are based in Scotland we will take, in fact want, incidents from throughout the UK.

Once incident details are received they are entered into a master sheet and categorised. This allows us to get a better picture of what is happening throughout the UK in relation to badger persecution and hopefully allows NWCUC to use its time more efficiently in targeting offenders. Please remember that NWCUC no longer collects incident data and Operation Meles is now the only place where all data on badger persecution is being collated on a national level.

## **Baiting incident near Doncaster**

Enquiries continue after a dead badger thought to have been baited with dogs was found on a sett at a locus near Doncaster. The complainer reported that there had been 4 digs at this sett since Christmas 2014. Historically the prime time for digging out setts takes place during the early months of the year although it can happen at anytime. NGOs received a further 6 reports of setts being dug in the UK with four more in England, and one each in Scotland and Wales.

## **Sett interference**

In relation to badger persecution by far and away the most reported incidents refer to sett interference whether through forestry, agricultural or development operations. These incidents can be complicated and often hard to investigate and really need to be looked at as soon as possible after they are reported. Of the 61 incidents we are aware of this year 22 refer to this kind of incident. Many refer to sett interference where the land is being developed or where planning applications are to be submitted. Each of these incidents will be unique in their circumstances but all cases will rely on good evidence that the sett was in “current use” prior to any operations taking place.

## **Road traffic victims?**

There has been an increase in persons reporting road traffic accident victims as suspicious deaths. Already this year of the 46 incidents reported to NGOs in England 10 refer to this type of incident. Whilst there is no doubt that the occasional illegally killed badger will find its way onto the road it is far more likely that they are RTA victims. Records show that there is a major peak in road kills as badgers start to move around again after the winter months and often several badgers will be found on the same stretch of road and often at the same place. Badgers being creatures of habit will cross the road regularly at the same place and occasionally we get reports of more than one animal being found together.

Similarly as badgers engage in territorial behaviour they fight and literally bite lumps out of each other. Typically territorial badger injuries appear as large sores on their backs above the tails. A number of incidents have been reported in the past where this type of injury is thought to have been the result of badger baiting activities.

## **Snaring incidents**

Despite changes to the legislation in Scotland relating to the possession and use of snares we are aware that already three incidents have been reported since the turn of the year. Police and SSPCA are still making enquiries into these incidents in which two badgers died and one was found still to be alive but badly injured. Two other incidents were reported in England and Wales during the same time period.

Remember under the WCA 1981 Section 11(2)(a) it is an offence to set a snare where it is “likely” (Scotland) or “calculated” (England & Wales) to cause bodily injury to a badger which is listed under schedule 6 of the Act. A similar offence exists under the section 12(1)(a) of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

All live badgers found caught in snares should be taken into care and assessed for injuries prior to being released back into the wild.

## **Items for this bulletin.**

If you are aware of any incidents that can be included in a future issue of this document please forward details to me at [Ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk](mailto:Ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk). It is hoped that we will issue this document every three or four months. I can be contacted on 07866 844232

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