**Northumberland Badger Group.**



**Badgers Some brief notes.**

The only badger in the UK is the Eurasian Badger (Meles meles)

Badgers are closely related to otters, stoats, weasels, polecats and pine martens.

The face and snout are usually the characteristic black and white, however the body hair can vary in colour depending on soil, diet and genes.

They are largely nocturnal, normally shy, retiring animals that live in social or family groups known as clans.

A badger's home is called a sett. The sett is an underground home, often with a labyrinth of tunnels involving the excavation of tons of earth. Tunnels can be several metres deep and spread out over a large area.

An adult can grow up to 36" long and usually weighs from 22 to 27 lbs. Or for those who use metric 0.9m long and 10 -14Kgs

Badger prints are broader than they are long with five toes and five long, non-retractable powerful claws that they use for digging. The equivalent to our small toe is often hard to find as it makes a very light impression.

The sense of smell is the most important of the badger’s senses. Badgers forage for food with their snouts constantly sniffing the ground ahead of them.

Badgers are omnivorous and will eat a wide variety of foods, although their main diet consists of earthworms, up to 200 per day.

Badgers are less active during winter months but they do not hibernate.

The mating process involves "delayed implantation". Although females are able to mate any time after the cubs are born the fertilized egg does not implant in the uterus until December.

Badger cubs are normally born in February, the number of cubs usually being between one and three. Cubs emerge about May after spending the first 8-10 weeks underground.

Badger colouration is variable and depends on the substrate that they are living in or habiting at the time. When badgers are dug they can look disheveled and dirty and more easily pick up surrounding area colour.

Badger hair is rough and this causes particles of soil to become attached while they move about in the sett as well as from surrounding vegetation and other surfaces they come into contact with.

In the monograph of 1948 and 1962 (second edition) in the New Naturalist Monograph “The Badger” by Ernest Neal reference is made to the colouring looking grey from a distance though there is a lot of variation. Dr Neal then goes on to describe in some depth the composition of the colouring. Reference is also made that in diurnal animals the upper parts are darker than the under which produces an appearance of flatness and tonal-similarity against a background when light rays of varying intensity strike the animal. With nocturnal animals, including the Badger, the opposite is true. The colour variation in dorsal area hairs which are most commonly seen in a fleeing badger can vary significantly depending on the age of the beast concerned. The percentage of white to black proportions of individual hairs increases with age. It is also known and commented on by Dr Neal that there are variations in greyness with some verging on silvery. A yellowish form is also known to occur which can influence the overall colour view.

In the 1986 book “The Natural History of Badgers” by Ernest Neal which was reprinted in 1987 and 1990 Dr Neal makes reference to the fact that there are at least three easily recognized colour variations: melanistic, albino and erythristic, but that there are also intermediates between these three categories caused by varying amounts of melanin deposited in the guard hairs. There are also colour varieties which do not fit into any of the above categories, notably a sandy yellow badger. The above references are also mentioned in the most recent monograph published about badgers namely “Badger” by Prof. Timothy J Roper. It should also be noted that badger colouring can be affected by the local soils as well as moisture. When badger fur is damp or wet it appears a different shade to when dry. Badgers normally being very clean animals look after their fur, however due to tunneling, foraging and other external influences their coat may temporarily take on the hue of the surrounding substrate. This could include picking up dirt from a bag or floor when in captivity. Once free and able to spend time the badger will groom to ensure its fur stays clean.