Badger Crime

There are several forms of badger crime. Causing damage to a badger sett is a non-violent crime. A very violent crime is badger-baiting. This is a blood "sport" in which badgers are made to fight with dogs. A "badger bait" results in the death of the badger, and often serious injuries to the dogs.

Badger-baiting has happened for hundreds of years. Despite being made illegal in the UK in 1835, this cruel practice still goes on.

Baiting other animals was forbidden under the Protection of Animals Act 1911. Cruelty towards a badger is also an offence under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. If convicted, badger baiters may get 6 months in jail or a fine of £5000, as well as community service and a ban from owning dogs.

Drawing a Badger (out of a wooden box) with a dog by Henry Thomas Alken (around 1820)

Animal Cruelty

Apart from the cruelty towards badgers, dogs are also injured in the blood sport. Dogs usually suffer injuries to the face and neck. In some cases, the injuries are so bad that the dog may be killed in the fight or dogs are hurt so badly they can not recover and need to be put to sleep by a vet.

Badger baiters do not usually take their dogs to vets as the vet may realise what has happened and report them to the police.

To make sure the dog wins the fight, the badger may be restrained or have its front claws cut off; teeth pulled out; or jaw broken with a shovel.

A terrier baiting a Badger (photo courtesy of the League Against Cruel Sports)

When the badger can no longer fight, it will be killed by the dogs or the baiters. It may be shot, stabbed or beaten to death with a shovel. Dead badgers may be dumped on the road in the hope they will be mistaken for traffic accidents (a major cause of badger mortality) or even as a sick badger baiting "trophy".

Without a doubt, badger baiters can resort to high levels of violence. **If you come across a badger crime, please find a safe place from which to make a phone call and report this to the Police on 999**. Please be sure to stress the fact that a crime is taking place; and that you need the specialist expertise of a Police Wildlife Officer. If you feel that your safety is being threatened, please mention this too.

Modern times

Badger baiters have access to certain types of dogs. These are usually terriers, such as Patterdales; or cross-breeds such as Patterdale/ Staffordshire Bull Terrier / Lurchers. These dogs may be traded or exhibited at agricultural shows by "terriermen"; who will swap ideas about how best to train them to attack badgers, foxes or deer. Badger baiters may meet up with other people and travel outside their local area. They do this to avoid being recognised; and to find those areas where badger setts are more accessible, more vulnerable to attack or not overlooked.

The local badger group volunteers are very helpful in watching vulnerable badger setts and reporting suspicious activity. Volunteers should be aware of the "Useful Information to Record" list overleaf. This will help the Police track down suspicious vehicles and find people who commit these crimes. The local badger group may have close links to specialist Police Wildlife Officers or the RSPCA/SSPCA.

Badger Crime

There are regular news reports about how badger baiters are discovered. It is worth searching popular news sites (such as www.bbc.co.uk/news/) for reports. Wildlife Crime is also reported by the League Against Cruel Sports (www.league.org.uk).

Badger digging is where a small terrier is fitted with an electronic collar and put into a badger sett or a fox earth. The men track the dog using a radio receiver; and then dig down to find the fox or the badger so they or the dogs can kill it.

Lamping is where the criminals shine a bright light across a field, to find a badger, fox or deer. When the victim is dazzled by the light the men send a dog running down the beam. The animal can not see into the light so can't see the dogs. These dogs (typically Lurcher/Bull Terrier crosses) may be used to attack the animal, or to hold it down until it can be shot.

Badger baiting was often seen as a "working class" pastime, but this is not always true now. What follows are a couple of lists to help identify typical badger baiters, and what information to record if you come across badger crime.

Profile and Behaviour of a Badger Baiter

- Van or 4-wheel drive vehicle.
- Dog cages in the back of vehicles. These may be home-made wire cages or boxes.
- Own lurchers and/or small terrier dogs (terriers are sent down setts, lurchers fight the badgers outside).
- Dogs live outside in kennels, either at the owner's home or in a separate garage or field (dogs kept away from the baiter's home, in case of a raid).
- Baiters may leave their homes early in the morning and arrive home in the afternoon.
- Lampers leave later to go lamping in the dark.
- Vehicle will be loaded with dogs, spades, tracking devices and electronic dog collars.
- If they leave at night, they will have large torches or lamps with them. These may be attached to vehicle.
- Dogs will often return with nasty injuries on their faces and rumps, caused by fighting with badgers.
- A badger baiter can be aged from 14 upwards. No typical characteristics – can appear a perfectly ordinary and amenable member of society or someone who is intimidating and threatening.

Phone 999 to report a badger crime in progress.

Badger Baiters Injured Dog (courtesy of the RSPCA)

Useful Information to Record

- **A**ge
- **B**uild
- **C**lothing
- **D**og descriptions & names
- **E**thnic appearance
- **F**acial features
- **G**ender
- **I**ntonation or Accent
- **K**it used
- **L**icence plate numbers
- **M**ake, Model & Colour of vehicles
- **N**umber of people

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