

# Operation Meles

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

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## Has anything really changed?

The Magistrates of Walsall, laudably desirous of suppressing as far as they can the brutal and demoralising practices of bull baiting and cock fighting have given notice of their determination to inflict upon all persons who may be convicted of these offences the utmost extent of punishment authorised by law... By the Act o the 5th and 6th years of the reign of his present Majesty any person who shall assist in the baiting of any bull, bear or badger, or in fighting any dog or any animal or in cock fighting shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding £5 and not less than 10 shillings'

Staffordshire Advertiser 13th August 1836

## Some convictions from 2014

February at Northallerton Magistrates sentenced for badger baiting two months curfew and fitted with a tag.

March at Hamilton Sherriff Court two found guilty of badger baiting ordered to carry out 250 hours unpaid work each. Banned from keeping dogs for 10 years.

June at South Cheshire Magistrates Court 58 weeks imprisonment for interfering with a badger sett and cause an animal unnecessary suffering. Van and equipment confiscated and dogs handed over to RSPCA. All four were ordered to pay £200 to the RSPCA.

July at Burnley Magistrates Court attempt to kill a badger, cause unnecessary suffering to an animal 316 days imprisonment

September at Caernarfon Magistrates Court possession of dead badger, causing unnecessary suffering to dogs 3 months suspended prison sentence. Banned from keeping dogs 10 years, dogs seized, unpaid work requirement, electronic tagging.

November male from Torphichen , West Lothian sentenced after a dead badger was recovered in a snare. Fined £865



## **Seven Appear in Court**

Seven people appeared at Plymouth Magistrates Court following a joint investigation by police and the RSPCA into dog and animal fighting. The six men and one woman were summonsed to Plymouth Magistrates Court to face a total of 35 counts under the Animal Welfare Act, the Protection of Badgers Act and the Deer Act. The case was adjourned until December 2nd 2014.

## **Incident Roundup**

As the year drew to a close we were aware that 380 incidents had been reported and recorded. We are sure that there are many more incidents which have not been passed to us and we would strongly urge you to let us know if you haven't passed details in yet. You can send the details to [Ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk](mailto:Ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk) who is responsible for collating the records. Badger Persecution is a UK Wildlife Crime Priority and without all the figures it is proving difficult to analyse the extent of the problem.

Since the last news sheet in July 155 new incidents were reported and of course the usual trends stand out with nearly 50% of those being caused by unlicensed and or illegal work being carried out on or near badger setts. Unfortunately we still getting reports of alleged interference with badger setts by some Hunts and to allay any confusion it is illegal to block a badger sett for the purpose of hunting.

Badger baiting or rather digging for badgers continues to be widespread and 16 new incidents were reported over the past few months. Although we received no reports from Northern Ireland all of the other three countries reported crimes. You can rest assured that given the past history in Northern Ireland they too will have suffered from this type of crime.

Reports of badgers being caught in snares continue to be reported and whilst a couple have been released after treatment some have either been dead when found or have had to be euthanized. Should you be involved in an incident involving a live badger in a snare then please take steps to have the animal examined by a vet prior to release. The badger struggles against the snare to get free and in doing so can cause injuries which are not obvious such as subcutaneous bruising which can lead to life threatening symptoms developing such as necrosis.

Badger crime is never that clear and a number of suspicious deaths have been reported some of which are no doubt victims of road accidents. However not all are and recently a dead badger found at the roadside was found to have a snare attached although it is not clear where the incident occurred the animal had obviously broken free before succumbing to its injuries. The level of cruelty also remains and in one of the most horrific acts it was reported that the contents of a cess pit were emptied into the sett. Attempting to drown any creature in excrement and waste must surely be one of the worst cases we have heard of this year.

## **Two Pled Guilty to Badger Offences**

Two defendants from Liverpool appeared before Mold Magistrates having pleaded guilty to digging for a badger and attempting to take a badger from a sett in Holywell last April. This is a particular barbaric offence where the animal is killed cruelly and the dogs used often receive serious wounds and the injuries go untreated. There are strong links with the badger being taken and illegal dog fighting. Both defendants received 160 hours community service, £300 costs each and £65 surcharge each. All of their equipment was forfeited, including their Land Rover Discovery, which the team may now use.

## **Enquiries into Alleged Offences by Hunts**

There have been a number of complaints recently about hunt activity at badger setts where allegation are made that foxes are being dug out from live badger setts or that the setts have been blocked. It is vital that expert witnesses are brought in at the earliest opportunity to ascertain whether a sett is in "current use" or not. Any delay in visiting the alleged scene of crime can weaken the possibility of a successful prosecution. Setts should be visited on the day of the alleged offence where possible but as soon as reasonably practical thereafter. It is an offence to interfere with a badger sett and there are no exceptions for The Hunt or their terrier men.

## **Badger Setts Checked**

An initiative between Staffordshire Police and the Staffordshire Badger Conservation Group to protect badger setts has been welcomed in local communities. It is based on the intelligence-led UK-wide police operation to gather evidence of badger persecution and identifying and targeting offenders. The Staffordshire Badger Conservation Group work tirelessly to stop badger persecution and let police know the location of badger setts across the county. Police regularly check the badger setts to make sure they have not been disturbed. They also call at homes, farms and other rural businesses to explain their work, asking people to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity.

Sgt Tony Drinkwater, force rural crime officer, said: "Working together with the Staffordshire Badger Conservation Group and local communities enables us to gather intelligence and evidence so that offenders can be brought to justice. We have been delighted with the level of engagement with local communities who appreciate our work in protecting wildlife and reducing rural crime."

**We would encourage anyone who has any information about wildlife crime, or have any suspicions, to contact us on 101. Alternatively, to remain anonymous, contact the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.**

## **Road Deaths**

Unfortunately the time of year is fast approaching when road deaths will increase to a peak during February/March. Many of those badgers will be genuine road casualties but a number will be the result of animals being illegally killed and then dumped on the road to hide them in the midst of the carnage of the genuine road deaths. It is worth checking these dead animals to see if there are any obvious indications as to how they died. The most obvious signs will include marks left behind by snares or wounds suffered as a result of being shot either with a firearm or shotgun. If you are at all worried about how a particular animal died then you should inform the police whose duty it is to collect any necessary evidence. Please don't remove the carcass from the locus.

We would hasten to issue a word of warning, You should never place yourself or other road users in danger by stopping to check dead badgers. You should only do this if it is safe to do so and remember it is illegal to stop on a motorway .

## **Two Arrested and Dogs Seized Shropshire**

After an early morning raid between Police and RSPCA a male and a female were arrested and a number of dogs thought to have been used in animal fighting and badger baiting were seized. Additionally a rifle was seized and is being forensically examined for evidence. It is not clear at this time whether or not the rifle was legally held or not. Intelligence was apparently received and suspicion aroused that the two were in possession of dogs which were displaying injuries consistent with those sustained when dogs fight with badgers and in particular were displaying wounds to the lower jaw. The dogs were immediately removed from the scene to a veterinary practice where they were treated and where they are being cared for.

### **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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