



# BADGER PERSECUTION PDG

## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4: May 2021

### INTRODUCTION

**DC Aaron Flint** – *National Chair - Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group*

Hello. Firstly, I consider myself extremely lucky to have been given the post as the new National Chair with the Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group. I have taken over the role from Chief Inspector Kev Kelly and I am acutely aware that I have big shoes to fill. Kev has done a great job during his time on the PDG and I intend to continue to build on the excellent work that he, and the other members, have done so far.

A bit about me – I am Aaron Flint, I have 18 years' service as a police officer, firstly with Nottinghamshire Police and now with Lincolnshire. I am a Detective Constable and a Wildlife Crime officer for my force. I also have a degree in Zoology from the University of Aberystwyth.

I have been officer in the case of some very successful wildlife crime investigations over the years and have been lucky enough to work with some fantastic colleagues from within the police and also from partner agencies during this time. I have had a varied career as a Detective. During the last 10 years on a serious and organised crime team dealing with various drug trafficking conspiracies, cross border burglaries and ATM rip outs. I have become adept at identifying and targeting cross border criminals using various means – I feel my experience gained from this line of work

can be directly transferred to the work within the PDG.

I really want to help make a difference in this role. I want to help champion the cause for badgers and bring about a much-needed change to the way they are treated by certain members of our society. I want to help work towards ensuring the crimes against badgers are officially recorded by forces around the country and I want to see the severity of the sentences for these offences to match the severity of the crime committed. This can only be done by working in partnership with other agencies which is why I'm delighted that the Badger Trust, Naturewatch Foundation, the league against cruel sports and of course the NWCU are all on the PDG. Together we really are a force to be reckoned with when we work effectively together in partnership.

Lastly, I would encourage anyone reading this to get in touch with me or any of the PDG members if you have any ideas or initiatives that you feel could help the Badgers of the UK.

The PDG has made a massive difference under Chief Inspector Kelly and I intend to help further this great work in the future.



## Naturewatch Foundation launches an educational video for teenagers, raising awareness of badger crime



**Last month, Naturewatch Foundation launched an inspirational documentary film about badgers and the threats they face, aimed at teenagers.**

The film can be viewed on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFOaDcKSMUk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFOaDcKSMUk)

The reason for producing the film is because children witness their parents bait badgers and are subsequently not aware that it is morally wrong, or even illegal. To disrupt this generational pattern, Naturewatch Foundation was approached by police, requesting they set up a school education programme about the illegal persecution of badgers.

The charity invites anyone who works with teenagers to feature the short documentary in their schedules, including teachers, youth workers, police officers and wildlife organisations. They also provide a free Education Support Pack to supplement the video upon request by emailing [info@naturewatch.org](mailto:info@naturewatch.org)

The film was produced by Alex Collins, a young conservationist and filmmaker. In the documentary, Alex takes the audience deep into the forest to the site of a badger sett. Delving into the lives of badgers, he explores not only their ecology and how vital they are to their ecosystems, but also the terrible persecution they face at the hands of humans, particularly in the form of badger baiting.

The film teaches teenagers how to recognise signs of wildlife crime and asks them to contemplate ways they can help protect badgers if they suspect persecution is happening.

Jennie Rudd, Naturewatch Foundation Campaign Manager, said: "Our programme contributes to the UK strategy to prevent illegal badger persecution by raising awareness of the problems they face to the next generation of wildlife advocates, whilst at the same time supporting police intelligence which may lead to prosecutions.

"Our patron, Chris Packham CBE, was interviewed on BBC Morning Live regarding his support for the film. It has also received interest from people with a wide range of backgrounds including police from England and Scotland, badger groups, teachers, councillors and online influencers."

Packham said: "The film offers teenagers the chance to appreciate and connect with the natural world, and with a creature they may have previously had little knowledge of. As we have learned, particularly during the pandemic, nature has been recognised as a source of inspiration and comfort for so many of us. It is more important than ever that we inspire the younger generations to become guardians and protectors of our natural world and all the beautiful creatures that call it home, particularly the humble and highly victimised badger."



# BADGER TRUST UPDATE

Craig Fellowes - Badger Trust



What a year 2020 has been on so many issues and badgers have suffered as well throughout. Figures from incident data of reports to the Badger Trust show that overall all reported areas of persecution have seen an increase compared to 2019. As reported previously it's clear that reporting has been on the increase following a concentrated educational effort for groups, individuals and of course the police.

One area which has not increased to the same levels is that around sett blocking in particular those suspected to be associated with Fox Hunting. Of course COVID has virtually prevented the meeting of fox hunts and of course the potential consequence of sett blocking.

Overall we have seen a 78% increase in all reported incidents data, with the biggest increase being around development issues at around 168%.

In November 2020 the Badger Trust launched the short information film narrated by Mike Dilger with contributions by North Yorkshire Police, RSPCA and of course Badger Trust. The information film 'Stop Badger Crime' has proved very successful and can be found on you tube or by contacting me.

Training has been somewhat limited in 2020 for groups and police, but limited training has been delivered and a successful run of 3 online training sessions offered to groups earlier this year.

As for police training that has proved challenging and the Badger Trust has confirmed the continued commitment to deliver training to every police force in England & Wales, and we are now in a position to offer this

'free' training to all police forces again even if you have previously received one. Please contact me for further details.

Finally Badger Trust are pleased to continue to work with and support this priority group and are working towards an 'Advanced Practitioner' course. The first of these will be on the 22nd June in North Yorkshire with a further one planned southern England later. The aim of this course is:

**To increase the knowledge and experience of selected WCOs for England & Wales with a view to increasing the effectiveness of investigations and the reduction of the failure rate of investigations due to the officers not collecting the evidence at an early stage.**

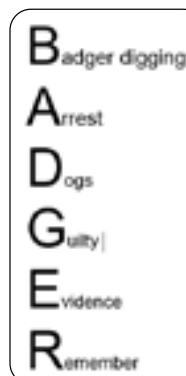
The course is aimed at wildlife crime officers with some experience with badger related matters and ideally attended some form of training previously.

## Rollout of the Badger Crime Toolkit

Sue Eddy - National Wildlife Crime Unit

One of the key deliverables from the Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group was the creation of the Badger Crime Toolkit. The Toolkit has now been rolled out to all Police Forces in England and Wales (via the main wildlife crime leads). The Toolkit is an invaluable resource for any police officer who is called to investigate a badger crime. It contains investigative and interview assistance, sample impact statements and guidance on expert witnesses. The Crime Guide that was developed by Badger Trust and NatureWatch Foundation is also included as an integral element of the Toolkit.

Police officers can obtain current versions of the entire Toolkit via the NWCU (<https://www.nwcu.police.uk/contact/>) or by joining the Wildlife Crime Group on the Police ICT Knowledge Hub (<https://knowledgehub.group/welcome>). NWCU are working with all the other Priority Delivery Groups to ensure these operationally essential Toolkits will be rolled out for every Wildlife Crime priority.



## Caroline Newsome West Yorkshire Police



In the last newsletter, I wrote about two teenage boys, who had lit a fire at a beauty spot, oblivious of the fact that their 'fire pit', was actually the entrance to a badger sett. A crime was recorded and whilst neither received a criminal record, time was spent educating them, about all things badger. Thankfully, the badgers seem to have fared well, from this episode, and the sett is showing signs of being very much inhabited.

I can't say for certain that lockdown has caused additional badger related problems, but restrictions imposed on our usual freedoms, led to many people venturing into the countryside, and in some cases causing issues for some of those that live in the more rural communities.

We had problems with 4 x 4 vehicles, churning up once quiet country lanes, a slight increase in dogs attacking livestock, damage to farmers fences, fields damaged due to an increase in footfall, littering, and fly tipping.

Whilst most enjoyed and respected the great outdoors, there were those that created problems for our badgers, and I question whether these acts were carried out, out of ignorance, or because people simply don't care.

Two crimes recorded during lockdown were in relation to a sett that had been dug into, and damaged, on two occasions, forcing the occupants to move out. This is a good outlier sett, around 100 metres from the main sett, located in a small wood, overlooking fields, with stunning views across a valley. The sett hadn't been dug as a result of a visit by baiters, nor was it the victim of development - this was clearly the work of mountain bike or BMX enthusiasts, creating ramps and jumps, to make the landscape that little more challenging.

Engagement was made with the local community, along with regular monitoring by myself and the Kirklees Badger Protection Group, and whilst

short-lived before they were ripped down, a number of posters were placed around the area, advising members of the public to contact the police should they see any persons causing damage, and potentially destroying wildlife habitat. Whilst no individuals were identified for this damage, the sett was left untouched, until February of this year.

I received a call from the badger group, stating the same sett had been dug, to create a jump for the bikes, and "you must see it, to believe the damage that has been caused!". I attended at the sett, and was horrified to find what I can only describe as a deep crater, leaving two of the tunnels completely exposed, and the likelihood that any badger that came to this sett, wouldn't touch it with a barge pole! The cyclists had clearly worked hard, creating some enjoyment for their selves, and in the process, destroyed part of the badger clan's home. It's hard not to get emotional, seeing such destruction, when upon looking around, there were enough natural dips, curves and twists, without altering this natural beauty spot, and wildlife haven.

The sett was monitored with a wildlife camera, for a period of time, and with no sign of badger activity, I made a quick phone call to the landowner and Natural England, and the badger group plus other volunteers, were able to repair and protect the sett. This took place at the end of February, fitting reinforced pipes, steel wiring, (making the sett impenetrable), topped with earth, and a covering of natural foliage. I am delighted to report, that a week or so later, footage was captured of a badger entering the sett, and the sett still shows signs of regular use.

**Those responsible for this damage, have not been identified, and enquiries will continue.**

A further problem we have encountered, more so in the Calderdale area of West Yorkshire, comes as a

consequence of bottle digging.

For those unfamiliar with this pastime, there are numerous Victorian and Edwardian rubbish tips scattered around the country, most left to the elements, becoming rich in vegetation and wildlife, and others may sit, for example, under a local golf course or an allotment. In days gone by, coal ash from the household fire would be deposited here, along with other waste, including glass and stone bottles.

Bottle diggers/collectors will go to great lengths to dig for intact bottles, some of which can be worth hundreds of pounds to the lucky finder.

A conflict of interest arises - Badgers like digging, as do bottle diggers, and the badgers have built their underground homes, excavating tunnels and chambers into some of the old ash tips, and the police have taken reports of setts having collapsed, as a consequence of people digging for bottles.

Of course these incidents are recorded as crimes under The Protection Of Badgers Act 1992, meaning one could receive a hefty fine for causing damage to a sett, or 6 months in prison, but this is also about raising awareness to those that might not have any knowledge that in their desire to unearth their next treasure, they could be causing the death of any animals underground – and committing a wildlife crime.

Our badgers have many challenges, including RTAs, development, those that would dig them from the safety of their sett, to force them to fight powerful dogs, to an ultimate death, etc, and whilst the police and partner agencies continue to deal and investigate badger persecution, I do believe the incidents I have mentioned earlier, are very much avoidable.

**Please continue to report all crimes against our wildlife, and contact your local badger group, if you feel you can help in the fight against badger persecution.**

### RETIREMENT OF VALUED MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

**Chief Inspector Kev Kelly** has now left the PDG to move on to being the head of NWCUC and **Andy Swinburne** has announced his plan to retire and leave the group. The members of the PDG want to wish both of them the very best of luck in their future endeavours and want to thank them for all of the hard work and determination they have put into the group over the years. Badger crime investigations are in a much better place due to your membership of the group – you will both be greatly missed.