



# Wild Ways Well and Badgers

Today's Wild Ways Well task is to go for a walk in your local greenspace and look out for signs of mammals – in particular badgers! Remember to follow the guidelines on social distancing and only walk in your local area.

Badgers are elusive, they can have large territories and their trails can be few and far between. Looking for badger signs helps you to **Be Active** and explore your area.

Badger signs can be very subtle. Examining every inch of ground to try and spot a snuffle hole, a scratching tree or a feeding area means you have to **Take Notice** of all the signs around you as you walk.

Despite the fact that they live all around us badgers haven't been all that well studied by science and their behaviours can be very mysterious. While studying them you can **Keep Learning** new facts about their habits and their lives.

When working in your local area you'll probably find that you are tracking one specific group with only a few members. By observing their daily habits you will soon really **Connect** with their lives. There are also organisations, groups and individuals out there who love and protect badgers and who are always delighted to welcome new members. A quick search online will show some local to you.

By **Giving** your time to study badgers in this way you are aiding conservation by adding to our knowledge of these species. Records of the individuals you see will be much appreciated by recording organisations. If you decide to encourage mammals in your area by providing feeding grounds or habitat you'll be making their lives a little easier and by taking an interest you'll also be helping protect them from those that might wish them harm.





## Badger, Badger, Badger

Badgers are native to the UK. They are our largest land predator by weight – though they are actually very omnivorous, adapting their diet to habitat and season.

They are nocturnal, spending their days underground. Any hole which a badger inhabits is called a 'sett'. Some setts can be very large with networks of tunnels and entrances. Their stripy, black and white faces might help them to identify each other at night and their low slung, powerful bodies and sharp claws means they can dig quickly and efficiently.

Contrary to popular belief their favourite food is not mashed potato, they prefer earthworms which make up to 80% of their diet. They are able to eat several hundred a night, sometimes sucking them up out of the ground like spaghetti!

They live in small family groups called a 'clan' and are active throughout the year, they don't hibernate but do slow down in winter, sleeping and resting more to conserve energy.

They are territorial and each clan will maintain several setts across their territory which they will defend against other badger families.

They are found across the Lowlands but are absent from large parts of the Highlands. A large number are killed on the road each year, another primary cause of death is starvation in dry weather.

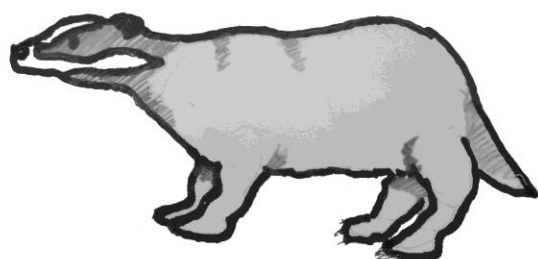
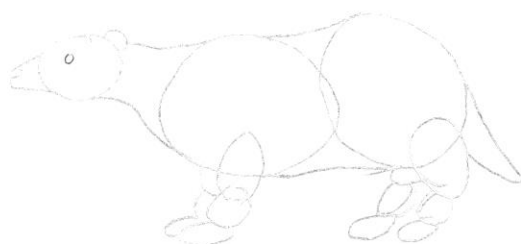
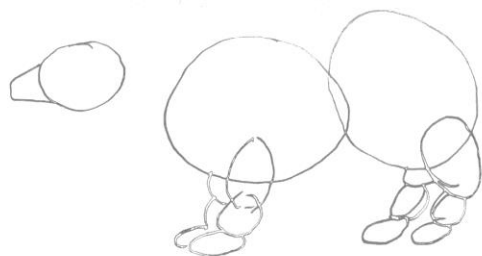
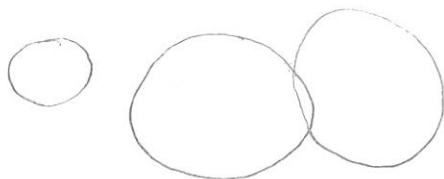
### Badger Factoids

- Length - 75-100cm
- Weight - 8-12kg
- Lifespan - 5 years in the wild, up to 14 in captivity
- Diet – Omnivore
- Breeding – Mating takes place all year but peaks between February and May. Females practice delayed implantation and litters of 2-3 young are born in February the next year. Young are weaned after about 12 weeks and will be living independently by late summer.





## Draw A Badger



Art can be really therapeutic – and you don't have to be a brilliant artist to have a go at drawing! Why not try this simple badger. All you need to do to start is draw three circles with a pencil.

Draw an oval for the snout and add a few more to make up the legs and feet.

Now draw some curved lines to connect all the circles together. Add a tail, eyes and ears.

You're almost done... Rub out the parts of the circles that you no longer need and go over the rest in pen or heavy pencil. Shade the body in with grey and black – remember to leave some white stripes on the face!







## Badgers and You

Badgers and humans have lived together here in Scotland since time immemorial. Ten thousand years ago, as the ice sheets receded and human settlements began to spring up across the British Isles the badgers were already there in the forest waiting, no doubt taking advantage of the human made woodland clearings to forage.

There's a good chance that a badger family still lives not far from where you live or work even today. They are elusive animals, active mainly after dark, sleeping underground during the day and naturally wary of humans, but once you tune in your senses you can often find signs of their lives all around.

Badgers are territorial and are creatures of habit, by taking care to observe the landscape around you, you'll soon begin to build up a picture of the creatures you are sharing your space with.

Look for travel signs—flattened trails through the grass, footprints in mud, smoothed rocks and branches where generations of animals have crossed the same obstacle. With a little care it is possible to find their feeding spots and examine where they ate their breakfast, track down their homes and study how often they come and go, how many live in a particular area and where their favourite snoozing spots are.

You can also search out the things they leave behind, tracks and trails, discarded bedding, hairs snagged on fence posts—even their droppings, all carefully deposited in latrines, if you're brave enough to look (and sniff!).

And you don't have to do any of this alone. There are organised surveys that you can use to catalogue your findings and organisations like Scottish Badgers who would love to hear from you.





## Take a Closer Look

Badger photo Courtesy Elliot Smith

Wherever you live in Cumbernauld there is a good chance that you are sharing your space with some badgers. Badgers mainly come out at night and they have great senses of smell and hearing so are adept at hiding when people are about. You could live alongside badgers for years and never actually see one – but you can look for the signs of their presence that they leave behind.

A good place to start looking is along linear features in the landscape – paths, streams, ditches and walls. Try to work out how the badgers are crossing over these.

Badger trails are traditional – its possible the badgers will have been using the same path every night for years. Look for long lines of flattened vegetation leading through areas where dogs and people are unlikely to have been. Badger paths will go through thick vegetation that people and deer wouldn't fit through – or they'll leave marks on rocks and sticks on the ground that other animals would step over.

Badger holes tend to look like a sideways D shape – wider than they are tall, just like the badgers themselves! There will probably be several holes with paths leading between them and prominent heaps of earth the badgers have been excavating. Remember any hole a badger has made or used is protected by law, you must not disturb it. If any badgers are present underground they will know you are there, don't hang about too long as you may prevent them emerging to feed later that night.





## Badger Signs



A badger sett with spoilheap and D shaped holes



Scratch marks on a log where badgers have been passing or sharpening their claws



Bare patch on a log in the middle of a path



'Snuffle Hole' where a badger has caught a worm



Badger footprint (photo courtesy Philip Precey)



## The Badger Year

### January

Female Badgers Present

### February

Peak Time for Badger Cub Births

### March

Badgers very active, collecting bedding, foraging, many road deaths.

### April

Badger cubs exploring setts. May venture out on warm nights

### May

Badger cubs exploring around sett

### June

Badgers sometimes seen in daylight

### July

Droughts can cause badgers to travel long distances

### August

Badgers eating cereals and fruits

### September

Badgers gathering bedding material

### October

Badgers prioritise feeding

### November

Badgers begin their winter slowdown

### December

Badgers spend a lot of time underground. Female badgers become pregnant (badgers are capable of delayed implantation, they mate all year round but fertilised eggs are stored and do not implant in the uterus until December.)







## History and Folklore

Badgers have lived in Scotland for thousands of years and have always had interactions with people. The Scots word for badger was Broc – and you can still find their name in places like Ibrox and Broxburn.

Because they only came out at night they were rarely seen before people had electric lights and so they were widely misunderstood. They were often regarded as ‘vermin’ and were persecuted almost to extinction by the late 1800’s. People used to hunt them at night on horseback or capture them and cruelly force them to fight dogs.

Gamekeepers and farmers killed them for supposedly preying on their grouse and lambs. Badgers might occasionally take an injured lamb or a bird egg if they can find one, but they are much more likely to eat worms, beetles, slugs and snails.

Other people killed them for their fur, for meat, or simply because they were in the way.

The saying ‘dirty as a badger’ was in popular use – and is very unfair as badgers are actually very clean animals, keeping their homes tidy and even regularly changing their bedding!

Another saying was ‘as rough as a badger’s bum’, this one is more accurate... Badgers practice both dominance and play fighting with each other, and this often leads to them pulling out some of the fur around their rear ends, leaving a rough bald spot!

People believed that badgers had one leg longer than the other (much like the Haggis) to help them run around hills, and there was even an idea that there was a much larger species of badger hiding in the countryside – that could grow large enough for people to ride!

In folklore badgers often represented persistence, determination and endurance. They were sometimes depicted as wise old storytellers and their habit of patient digging could lead them to be detectives and discoverers of secrets.

Do you have a favourite fictional badger character? Why not let us know on our Facebook page?







## Worm Charming

Earthworms make up 80% of a badger's diet, and they can eat several hundred every night.

Badgers use their acute senses of hearing and smell to detect worms just under the surface and then grab hold of them.

Why not see how good a badger you would be by trying to 'charm' some worms to the surface in a greenspace near you?

Worm charming is a traditional sport in some areas and there are lots of theories and closely guarded secrets as to the best ways to get worms to the surface.

Worms are sensitive to sound, vibrations through the earth, moisture and chemical signals. Some people have tried using lures like mustard or vinegar, others swear by singing or making sounds with weird and wonderful tools stuck into the ground, still others tap or dance to mimic rain falling (this is the technique being used by the seagulls you sometimes see 'dancing' in grassy areas, they're tapping the ground to attract worms).

Mark out an area on the ground about 1 metre square, set a timer (10 minutes is a good start) and go! You could try dancing on the spot, banging pots and pans, pouring out water, singing, playing a musical instrument, tapping out a rhythm – anything you can think of really!

The British record was set by 10 year old Sophie Smith who charmed 567 worms out of the ground in 30 minutes in 2009!





## Badgers and the Law

In Scotland you have a legal right to **responsibly** access most land—"The right to roam". While you can legally go almost anywhere it is often wise to think about whether you should. If someone objects to you to being on their land it is usually a good idea to leave. Wild mammals are no great respecters of the law and don't observe property boundaries, often they'll burrow or force their way into areas where you cannot legally follow, when this happens all you can do is record where they entered and practice tracking somewhere else. You must always take care not to damage the land you are accessing.

There are various laws which protect wildlife, the most famous being the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. Badgers are specifically protected under their own act – The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 – which was strengthened in 2004 and 2011. Under these acts it is a crime to recklessly injure, kill or disturb badgers.

It is also a crime to recklessly destroy, damage or disturb their homes or feeding grounds. It is an offence to block a badger path or access way and to block entrance to a sett. Note the word 'recklessly' - you don't have to know you are committing an offence in order to be guilty of it. Many of these structures will be delicate—it is surprisingly easy to collapse a badger tunnel by standing on top of it.

It is illegal to possess, buy or sell any part of a badger, living or dead, without a licence to do so—usually for educational or scientific purposes. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure any items you own, such as skulls or pelts, are legal.

Finally If you feel your activities (whether they are legal or not) are likely to disturb an animal it is a good idea to simply back away. Badgers have a difficult life, don't make it harder for them to find food or shelter.

Some animals and plants have even stronger protection—it is YOUR responsibility to know this and to act accordingly.



















# Look Out For Badgers

Looking for signs of mammals is a great thing to try on your walk. Why not see what you can spot?

- |   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| • A mammal trail                            |    | 1pt     |
| • A trail that disappears under a low bush  |    | 2pts    |
| • A trail with a bare patch on a rock/stick |    | 5pts    |
| • A hole made by a wild mammal              |    | 10pts   |
| • Disturbed ground where a badger has eaten |   | 5pts    |
| • Some mammal hair on the ground            |  | 2pts    |
| • A wild mammal footprint in the mud        |  | 2pts    |
| • A stream or ditch crossing point          |  | 2pts    |
| • A wall crossing point                     |  | 5pts    |
| • An earthworm                              |  | 1pt     |
| • 568 earthworms                            |  | 100pts  |
| • A badger                                  |  | 1000pts |

Total \_\_\_\_\_

Award yourself an extra point for each different species you find



# Wild Ways Well



**BE ACTIVE** – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

The Wild Ways Well project encourages people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health to get outside for some daily exercise and experience nature.

Remember to observe Social Distancing, stay 2m apart and only walk in your local area.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves you have a chance to slow down, relax and take your attention away from current events.

This guide will help you to try out some environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.

**CONNECT** – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



**GIVE** – Your time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.

**TAKE NOTICE** – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.



**LEARN** – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.







## Links

Go further with your Wild Ways Well Activity by trying these links once you come home

**Cumbernauld Living Landscape** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)

**Wild Ways Well** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well)

**Activities** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/)

**Facebook** [www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape](http://www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape)

**Twitter** [www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld](http://www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld)

**The Conservation Volunteers** [www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

**The Scottish Wildlife Trust** [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**SamH** [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

**NHS Five Ways Well** [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)

**MIND** [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing)

**Lanarkshire Green Health Partnership** [www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf](http://www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf)

**Scottish Badgers**  
[www.scottishbadgers.org.uk/](http://www.scottishbadgers.org.uk/)

**OPAL Soil survey (with downloadable worm charming guide)**  
[www.opalexplorenature.org/soilsurvey](http://www.opalexplorenature.org/soilsurvey)



[cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)