



Calderdale Badger Protection Group Annual report 2018



What a difference a year

I have been asked to provide an explanation as to why and how our group restarted. Well, here it is, and I am aware that the reason why may seem rather eccentric, but it continues to make sense to me.

Why the group restarted

In the spring or summer of 2017, I saw a very large, grey and still shape by the side of the road in broad daylight. He lay there as though his life had had no value, as though his dreadful death meant nothing. I parked and looked at him for a long time. How perfect he was. How beautiful. It felt unseemly and disrespectful to be so close to a wild and shy animal, and to see him at the wrong time and in the wrong place, and so terribly defenceless against our casual, human onslaught. I apologised to him on behalf of us all for our indifference and cruelty, and I promised him that I would do my best to do what I could for his kind from then on.

Getting it going again

It was clear that in order to give badgers the protection they needed and deserved, a band of people would be required to come together for that specific purpose.

To all intents and purposes, the old Calderdale badger group had ceased to function. I didn't know if it could be reformed but, if not, I'd have to start again from scratch. I read about all things badger that I could find, watched them for many hours and joined the Badger Trust and the League Against Cruel Sports to glean more knowledge and keep up to date with badger and general wildlife issues. I found out what was left of the old group and booked a place on the Badger Trust conference in November 2017.

There was an impatient wait for Christmas to come and go. I kept in touch with sympa-

Secretary Marguerite Penny looks back on 2018 - the year when Calderdale Badger Protection Group reformed and dedicated itself to the welfare of our stripy neighbours



Debbie Bailey of Derbyshire Wildlife Trust was the inspiration behind the Group's decision to pursue our own badger vaccination project.

Photo: Rachael Taylor

thetic local badger groups I'd met at the conference for advice and support. In January 2018, I contacted former members of the old group. Fortunately the treasurer from that group, Chris, rejoined. This was hopeful, as it would mean that we would have some experienced people on board. However, it was apparent that in order to be a properly functioning group we would need more and new members. How to do it?

I asked my daughter to make me a brand new email account, calderdalebadgers@yahoo.com, and design a flyer for me, which I then had printed. At the beginning of February, after I had put them up in libraries, sympathetic cafes, on noticeboards etc, my son put the flyer onto our local Facebook page and Elaine, a gem from the former group, put it on hers. The first flyer I put up was in the Co-op in Hebden Bridge. As I did my shopping I kept wondering if anyone would reply. Would anybody want to join the badger group?

The first thing I did when I got home was to look at the emails. There was a reply to the flyer from Joe. He wanted to join. The next day Diana emailed. Having seen the flyer on Facebook, she asked to join too. I felt hopeful.

The first meeting loomed. I sat in The White Lion on 7 March more than an hour before it was due to begin, wondering if anyone would turn up. Elaine, who had kindly arrived early as well for welcome support, said that at least two

people would be attending... The snug became full — enthusiastic people, quietly concerned people and people who had never seen a live badger but wanted to protect them anyway — all arrived and they exchanged sightings, ideas, worries and offered ways in which they could help. All generous and kind people. The group had started.

Looking after practicalities

It was essential for new and inexperienced members to have some knowledge of setts. Miranda, our ecologist member with a lot of experience of working with setts, kindly offered to provide a training session on this essential subject and delivered it on 4 April at Stubbing Wharf in Hebden Bridge. So, having the theory, the next thing was to provide some practical training in finding and monitoring setts. Sue Shaw from one of our neighbouring groups, Kirklees Badgers, generously took a few members on a sett walk on 14 April near Huddersfield. This showed setts in vastly different habitats. It was a very good template for future sett walks run by our own group for our own members.

It is very important to recognise the help, advice and support given by our neighbouring groups, Kirklees and Lancashire, and to thank them for all they have done for us. Without their guidance we would have found things more difficult and puzzling in setting our group up, but they were always there to lend a hand. From the Lancashire group, Dominic Coburn was a particular star, and Andy Hardman came to give us some pointers on how to approach planning applications in relation to badgers and setts. Craven, too, stepped in with equipment. I would like to think that we shall offer a high level of support to any other group, or intending group, that may require it. Working together is surely the only way we can protect our wildlife and their habitats. Our group has actually spilled over into different areas of Bradford to compensate for the fact that, despite the glaring need for a badger group there, very regrettably there isn't one, and so we work over our 'boundary' to check dead badgers. Badgers are badgers. We love them wherever they are.

Our first AGM took place on 24 April when the constitution was passed and members volunteered for roles.

A huge task was to write a constitution for the group, which is one of the requirements by the Badger Trust for local groups affiliated

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Annual report compiled by Emily Rawlins

makes!

to it. There was a constitution that the former group had, which Judy miraculously produced from her bag on the very first meeting, but it needed a great deal of work on it regarding additions and updates. This took a lot of time. Simon provided the conditions of membership (among many other contributions to the group), and Caroline wrote it and formatted it so that the scribbles, discussions and ideas were magically transformed into a proper document.

Phil took on the painstaking job of sorting out insurance for us. That is not a requirement by the Badger Trust, but a sensible way forward that values our members and recognises that we are in the real world and take our responsibilities seriously.

Simon also provided us with a database we could use for setts, RTAs, foraging areas etc. which would be a great help to us, especially as we were aware that the Government wanted to expand the cull to Low Risk Areas, such as Yorkshire, including Calderdale. They did of course subsequently do this, which made the mapping of setts an imperative.

We donated to Tom Langton's Judicial Reviews of the badger cull. We didn't want to forget that we were part of a wider community in badger protection. In recognition of this fact, Jonny and Andrew went on a Wounded Badger Patrol taster in Cheshire, to learn what it entailed and how to run one should we need to. We also had members volunteer to go to Derbyshire to help pre-bait on their badger vaccination programme – Rachael even managed to do two days. This was invaluable as it not only gave us some insight into the programme but also enabled our group to develop an important relationship with Debbie who runs it.

Getting our hands (and feet) dirty

Meanwhile, the real work of finding and monitoring setts was taking place. As we didn't have information on sett locations from the former group, we had the gigantic and daunting job of finding and mapping setts in the first place. This was seen as our priority. We had optimistically divided Calderdale into wards, and wanted each one to have an area organiser and a subgroup that would be responsible for their local area. Not all the wards even had members, let alone a co-ordinator, but it was the aim.

Members were going out looking for and mapping setts. Their dedication, determination and the time they spent on it cannot be underestimated. Of course, their experience was growing too.

We were going out to check dead badgers regularly, to check that they were victims of



Some of our members are fortunate enough to have badgers visiting their gardens

road traffic accidents and not of criminal activity, and also of course to see whether they were lactating females.

We worked with our first primary school on "Project Badger" in which diverse materials were developed to cover subjects from badger biology and behaviour to the dangers from development, crime, traffic and the cull. The children were engaged and responsive and even wrote to Michael Gove, Minister of the Environment, to protest against the cull.

We understood that we needed to raise funds for equipment, printing and other things. It was also clear that we needed training in badger rescue if we were to become a viable and proactive badger group. The best person to deliver would be Pauline Kidner, founder of Secret World, the acclaimed wildlife rescue centre in Somerset. When asked, she readily and very kindly agreed, and so we submitted an application for a grant to the Badger Trust (with significant help from Sarah) for nearly £1,000 to cover the cost of the course itself and essential rescue equipment. We were thrilled when we found we had been successful, and the stress of organising this was eased by Cath's eminent practicality and good sense.

September was another significant month. On 11th, Debbie and Gail from the Derbyshire Badger Vaccination Programme, the largest in England, came to talk to us about the possibility of vaccinating our badgers. We decided that we were on board. It meant that we had

to intensify our efforts to map setts in Calderdale. Secondly, on the weekend of 22 and 23, Pauline Kidner came to the Artsmill in Hebden Bridge to train us in badger rescue among other things (see back page).

We were quite sure from the outset that we wanted to work with the community wherever and however we can to protect our badgers. Local people have proved themselves to be passionate about looking out for their badgers and are best placed to monitor them and their setts. To involve the community more, we made and had printed a flyer that we distribute on our stalls and in areas where there are any badger issues.

The fact that we were paying for a website that we had no control over was something that had to be rectified. It was out of date and dysfunctional. We recognised, too, that we needed to raise our profile in the community. It was decided that, in addition to reclaiming our website, there were two other ways that we could do this. Firstly, we could start a Facebook page, and, secondly, we could run stalls. Phil and Jonny took on the website and Facebook jobs, and Jonny started to manage stalls and events. These were gamechangers. We were able to give information out and, very importantly, receive information from the public about setts, badger incidents and sightings.

Towards the end of the year we took the

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Money, money, money

Stalls supremo Jonny Morrison looks back on a year in which our newly reborn group made its presence known in fundraising events around Calderdale

Some members of Calderdale Badger Protection Group went to Derbyshire in June 2018 and were so impressed with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's programme vaccinating badgers against bovine TB that they inspired their fellow volunteers to



Above: Jonny, Joe and Andrew at Todmorden market; right: the poster for the Foxy Badger fundraiser

Photo: Cath Baker

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decision to separate Calderdale into three areas – West, South, and North and East together, as there we had fewer members. Each had its own area co-ordinator and subgroup, which would be responsible for finding, mapping and monitoring its setts, responding to incidents and working with its local community. It was very welcome when some former members came forward to share the information they had on sett locations.

We worked hard and achieved a lot in our first year. I feel indebted to the members who have enabled my promise to be fulfilled (even though until now they had no idea about it), and I am very grateful to them for everything they do to protect our wonderful badgers by dedicating their time and effort in whatever way they can. Not everyone can do as much as they would like to and that fact is acknowledged. Some worry that they are doing nothing but paying their subs, but that is a commitment in itself, and the membership of our group demonstrates to public bodies, agencies and the wider community that badgers are deserving of protection and that we are genuinely committed to that goal. Everyone's contribution is valued. We know that there is still, of course, a great deal left to do, and it is vital that we not only do as much as we can but also constantly aim to do more.

I still apologise to each dead badger I see for the indifference and cruelty of humans and I still promise them to do the best I can for badgerkind from now on. If our group doesn't do that, then who will?

Financial statement

For the period 1 January to 31 December 2018, by Treasurer Chris Gledhill

	£	£	£
Balance b/f:			875.62
Income			
Subscriptions	534.00		
Donations	158.22		
Sales / fundraising at shows	476.00		
Grants	978.00		
Other (Pauline Kidner Event)	852.06		
		2998.28	
Expenditure			
Badger Trust subscription	284.00		
Insurance	314.70		
Members' expenses	25.75		
Goods for sale	40.00		
Postage / stationery	80.00		
Equipment	236.67		
Fundraising / website	180.00		
Other (Secret World £570.00)	813.00		
		1974.12	
Balance as at 31/12/18:			1024.16



begin fundraising for our own vaccination programme.

In November we teamed up with West Yorkshire Hunt Saboteurs to hold a fabulous joint fundraising event at The Old Coop, Todmorden. Speakers included Debbie Bailey from Derbyshire Badger Trust and there was music from Biscuit Head and the Biscuit Badgers, Almighty Sound and The Moondalas.

Our volunteers worked really hard and made lots of food for the event, which was extremely popular. Our badger enthusiasts were greeted warmly by everyone who came to visit and the event raised a total of £401.02 for Calderdale badgers.

6 October was National Badger Day, and volunteers from the group went to Hebden Bridge to raise awareness and raise money by painting badgers on some lovely local faces.

It was really busy in the town and we were constantly asked by residents about badgers and how they could help protect them.

In December 2018, volunteers held a stall in Todmorden market, gathering lots of information about our local badger population from some very helpful residents. More pounds were raised for the vaccination programme and lots of leaflets were distributed.



From top left: a young badger fan in Hebden Bridge on National Badger Day; the Foxy Badger Fundraiser in The Old Coop - even badgers need refreshment!; and delicious vegan food proved a popular way to pull in the pounds

Photos: Cath Baker and Rachael Taylor

Everything we do hinges on knowledge about badgers. In 2018, the group appointed me as database administrator. Supported by the database support, it is my job to maintain and update our badger database. Inputting data may not be the most exciting part of our work, but the benefits to badgers of the analysis it provides cannot be understated.

As you might expect, the database contains data about setts, but also information on latrines, dead badgers, paths, foraging sites, and instances of persecution – any badger related information. Information is provided by group members and members of the public. Anyone who contacts us with information about badger activity provides vital clues.

Historically, much knowledge was stored in the heads of dedicated field monitors. This was a very secure way of storing information, but technology allows us now to be much more analytical in our approach to badger protection:

- We can quickly and accurately check for sett information should a dead badger be discovered to be a lactating female, meaning that there may be orphaned cubs nearby;
- We can identify high risk setts that require additional monitoring;
- Mapping the badgers of Calderdale will enable us to plan the roll-out of our vaccination programme, ensuring a strategic approach to this vital area of our work;
- Information gleaned may show activity in an area that we do not know of a sett, indicating the need to send out boots on the ground to survey that location;
- Records of badger activity enable us to support locals where there are

The joy of setts

Database administrator Cath Baker explains how we gather and record information on badgers - and why this is so important



Clockwise from top left: soft ground is useful for attracting badger pawprints; latrines are a good indicator of badger activity; black and white hair stuck to a fence indicates a badger passing point; and, sadly, road casualties can be the first indication we have of badgers in an area.

Photos: Cath Baker

issues with a planning application that will affect badgers and their habitat.

The database, containing such highly sensitive information, is stored securely and not available to all group members, but information is shared with area coordinators and members on an as-needed basis.

The database is only as good as the information it holds. When the new group formed at the start of 2018, we had no information about sett locations at all. Over the year, dedicated members foraged and snuffled their way through brambles and under-

growth, up hills and down gullies, finding signs of badger activity. The database began to take shape. Information was provided by members of the previous group, and extra locations were added.

Due to the make-up of the group, by the end of 2018 we had more information about some areas of Calderdale than others, but we have plenty of leads and plenty of new and dedicated volunteers to go surveying, so we anticipate having an increasingly accurate and up-to-date database to move forward into 2019!

It started with an email, this time from a man asking if someone from our group could visit him, as a badger had moved in under a garage in his street...

So we dutifully set off in some trepidation, as we understood that the badger was not welcome or wanted, and parked near the road where the badger had apparently set up home.

It was in a built-up area so hardly the sort of habitat that we would have expected, although our understanding of what that could be had certainly been expanding as our group was becoming more well-known and badger call-outs had

Badgers turn up in the strangest

increased. The house was at the end of a terraced row with doors that opened directly on to the street. There was a garage facing the house we had been called to, only a few metres away from the front doors. We had rung first and the gentleman was waiting for us. Very friendly he was, and full of information about his new neighbour.

He told us that at first he had thought it was a fox who was knocking over dustbins to find food, but then he'd seen the badger. Neighbours had seen it

too and had witnessed it disappearing into a hole at the side of the garage. He led us over the road. The lady whose garage it was had blocked the hole when she saw the badger leave, but each time the heavy stone had been carefully put to one side when she looked the next day.

This was worrying, we informed him. Any interference with a badger sett is illegal — even when the badger has taken over a human structure, as this one had.

The man looked at us expect-

tantly. So what were we going to do about this badger?

"I'm a farmer's son," he said, "so I was taught to hate badgers." He noticed my concern, so he added: "But I'd never hurt an animal."

We explained that we couldn't just move it. It wasn't as easy as that. He nodded. We gave him leaflets and our phone number and asked about the neighbours. What did they think about the new arrival?

He regaled us with how they kept watch through their win-



Clockwise from top left: badgers returning to an old sett often re-excavate ancestral bones; Andrew surveys the mother of all spoil heaps; and this sett was named "the donut" for obvious reasons!

Photos: Cath Baker

of places

dows at night, waiting for the badger to go snuffling around.

"It was knocking dustbins over because it was hungry, but he doesn't need to do that any more," he said. "He's all right now. He has chicken most nights, and often pizza...he does like pizza... He likes chips too, but we think his favourite is lasagne."

We pointed out that human food is not healthy for badgers. When the ground is hard and they can't eat worms, they appreciate fresh water, unsalted peanuts, soft fruit, sliced apples or pears, but feeding them regularly can put

them into dangerous situations or be unwelcome to neighbours.

The man listened, still smiling at the thought of "his" badger. "Of course, it's been hot, so I put a bowl of fresh water out for him every night," he went on. "You can hear him drinking. And then he knocks the bowl over...you can hear it clatter..."

I noticed how "it" had become "he" during the conversation.

"He must be the luckiest badger in all of Calderdale, if not England!" I exclaimed. Was there another badger who had a whole community looking after him?

We were interrupted by a

neighbour coming out, a young man with a phone in his hand who showed us photos of the badger who seemed oblivious to all the attention he was receiving. The man told us how he and his children watched the badger through the window and how he would like to tame him. We had to explain that badgers were wild animals who should not be encouraged to become unafraid of or dependent on humans.

"Best left wild," he agreed, nodding.

"He'll probably be on his way soon," I said. "He'll be too fat to fit through that hole."

The man who said he had been

taught to hate badgers suddenly looked sad.

"Oh, I'll miss him if he goes," he said quietly.

The community who loved the badger kept Cath, the area coordinator, informed about him. One night he was seen playing with a friend.

He did eventually move out. There is no doubt that he is missed. The residents fed, watered and cherished him, and in return he gave them the opportunity to be close to a wild animal and to have an unexpected relationship with the natural world. What a wonderful gift he gave them.

Sharing her secrets

Pauline Kidner of Secret World Wildlife Rescue in Somerset visited Calderdale to provide a weekend of invaluable training for members and guests, as Marguerite recounts

In order to be a viable and proactive badger group, it seemed clear that we would need to be able to respond to badger emergencies, such as injured or orphaned badgers. It was also clear that if we wanted to do that we would have to train our members in what to do and we would also need to know what equipment we would need.

There was a solution, and it resided in the approachable and generous person of Pauline Kidner, famous for her work at her acclaimed wildlife rescue centre, Secret World in Somerset. We were thrilled when she agreed to come up to Calderdale to give us a weekend's training in, amongst other things, badger rescue.

So, as we are affiliated to the Badger Trust, we applied for a grant from them that would cover both the cost of a weekend course and some essential rescue equipment, and we were delighted and grateful when our application for nearly £1,000 was accepted.

On the weekend of 22 and 23 September, Pauline and her husband Derek came to the Artsmill in Hebden Bridge, accompanied by rescue equipment, a makeshift swan, a toy badger, presentation paraphernalia and Secret World wares, and proceeded to enlighten us.

On the Saturday, Pauline taught us about health and safety issues in badger rescues, asked the important question "why bother?", showed us the rescue equipment that we would need and then proceeded to demonstrate how to rescue a badger in practice. We all then practised catching the amenable little badger she



Top: Pauline explains how to trap a badger, and Secret World merchandise; above: a grasper and practice badger; below: group members and guests listen intently

Photos: Phil Champion

Left: Pauline and badger from her promotional literature



had brought with her by handling it with the grasper and putting it safely into a cage.

After that she talked about badger crime and, after a session on badgers and bovine TB, she answered our questions. We felt that we were getting somewhere

with this badger business... On Saturday evening, Pauline gave us a talk on wildlife rescue in general, including animals such as deer, swans, owls and otters.

It was inspiring to hear her, and we were really impressed by her stamina as well as her dedication

to wildlife. On Sunday, she covered treatment and accommodation for adult badgers, orphan rearing, returning cubs to natal setts and the release of adults and orphans, before finishing again with questions.

To have had the benefit of Pauline's knowledge, skills and expertise was a huge and significant boost to our group.

It focused our minds on what we wanted to do and how to go about it, and gave us confidence that we could achieve our goals.

Furthermore, she has remained an advisor for us and a wonderful example of determination, compassion and ingenuity in working to benefit wildlife, and specifically for us, badgers.